AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS' VIEWS OF GENTRIFICATION IN CENTRAL HARLEM

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by

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Thesis Summary

Over the past decade, several studies looked at Harlem residents' perceptions of gentrification to understand how the process affected their lives and that of their families. However such studies mainly focused on the traditional African American and Latino communities, and did not account for the changing social fabric of the area, especially the growing presence of African immigrants who have been living in Harlem since the early 1980s, when they started to arrive *en masse* in the United States.

The study's main purpose was to correct such an anomaly, and asked African immigrants in Central Harlem their views of gentrification in the neighborhood.

The researcher delineated a study area between 125th street and 110th street, in a North-South direction; and between 8th and Lenox Avenue in a West-East direction, where he conducted 21 interviews over a period of a month. The participants, 10 women and 11 men, were at least 18 years old; had lived in the area for 5 years or more; and participated in the research in a voluntary non-remunerative basis.

The insights that transpired through the interviews suggest that, in the aggregate, Africans in Central Harlem positively regard gentrification in their neighborhood, namely the "convenience of life" and the security and safety that the process brings.

However, despite the overall appreciation of gentrification, African immigrants who participated in the study raised some serious concerns about the negative effects it might have on longtime Harlem residents. These apprehensions revolved around the increasing price of rent, the relative higher prices of groceries and other key services in the neighborhood, especially while Harlem booming economy, namely its flourishing business and service industries, seemed incapable of delivering the promises of a mixed economy tantamount to better jobs and more economic opportunities for the residents.

Nonetheless, the majority of Africans interviewed showed strong faith in the future of Harlem which they consider as their "home away from home," a quasi "sanctified" and sacred cultural place, in which they believe they deserved a special place where they can live peacefully, pursue their dreams of prosperity in America, and where they can weave their cultural and ethnic specificities within the larger "sanctity of black culture."

To conclude, the study suggests that City officials, and urban planners in particular, use both existing and other innovative policies and planning tools to consolidate the benefits of gentrification to local poor and low-income residents, including Africans, and mitigate the negative effects they suffer from the process, especially the high price of rent.

Moreover, the researcher argues that community participation—both within the existing local deliberative structures such as Community Boards, and across the various Harlem ethnic /cultural communities— can considerably help Harlem residents advance their vision of the neighborhood, and also provide African immigrants with more visibility and leverage in the larger Harlem socio-political landscape.

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I. Introduction

After decades of abandonment, economic disinvestment—to the benefit of suburbs—,urban decay and the strong stigma attached to the presence of rampant street violence, illegal drugs trafficking etc., most American inner cities, especially in large urban centers such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago etc., have been going through a process of revitalization, namely gentrification, whereby middle class individuals—mostly whites, more affluent, and more educated—move to previously blighted poor neighborhoods, occupied largely by black indigenous residents, often economically challenged and poorly educated.

Gentrification has been the subject of many studies that primarily focus on its effects—negative or positive—on the poor and low-income indigenous residents with varying results. Initial studies vindicated the early consensus that existed among scholars that gentrification was causing displacement of traditional residents by a more affluent "gentry" (Achtenberg and Marcuse, 1983; Hartman, 1982; Marcuse, 1985; Smith, 1996; Newman and Wyly, 2006; Slater, 2006).

However, over the last decade, other researchers challenged the "displacement paradigm" and conclusively showed that the displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods was relatively minor, and was not directly correlated to gentrification (Byrne, 2003; Freeman and Braconi 2004; Freeman 2006; McKinnish et al., 2008; Vigdor, 2002).

Freeman's study (Freeman, 2006) in the two gentrifying neighborhoods of Harlem and Clinton Hill in particular, showed that many indigenous residents had a positive view of gentrification and were accordingly holding on to their homes, mainly because of the new

amenities they enjoy with the physical changes happening in the neighborhoods, especially the growing presence of good services—relatively similar findings can be also found in Freeman and Braconi, 2004; Patel 2003; and Maurasse, 2006).

The research came to such conclusions through the distinctive use of semi-structured interviews that looked at the indigenous residents' perceptions of gentrification; how they responded to the physical and socio-economic changes taking place in their neighborhoods, and by extension, their relationship with the new middle class residents.

However, the study, as it was the case with most others previously conducted on gentrification in traditional low-income neighborhoods, involved primarily African Americans, and did not account for the presence of many African immigrants who are systematically identified with the indigenous residents with whom they normally share both physical characteristics and socio-economic status.

It is the case with Harlem, a traditionally black neighborhood in New York City, viewed by many as the "capital of Black America." The neighborhood boasts the active presence of an African community of immigrants, predominantly composed of Senegalese, Malian, Guinean, Burkinabe, Nigerian and Ghanaian. These residents, especially the Senegalese, have been living in great number in Harlem since the early largest vague of Sub-Saharan African migration in the early 1980s. Their progressive integration in the black community has been, in part, facilitated by the massive regularization of many illegal African immigrants through the Reagan Administration's Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986.

1. Study Rationale and Significance

Because previous researches failed to acknowledge the presence of the African immigrants' segment of the "traditional" Harlem black community, the research set forth to correct such an anomaly, and looked at what extent these immigrants have been affected by the gentrification of Harlem; how they particularly respond to the gentrification of their neighborhood, in terms of the multitude of responses they bring to the many changes that are taking place; what is their relationship with both the indigenous African American, Caribbean and Latino residents, and the new "gentry" as well.

To that end, the study chose to look specifically at a segment of Central Harlem's African immigrant community and ask them about their perceptions of gentrification in the neighborhood. Twenty one (21) semi-structured interviews were conducted with select immigrant residents asking about socio-economic characteristics such as age, race, matrimonial status, level of education, employment type etc., but also, as mentioned above, probing for respondents' perceptions on their gentrifying neighborhood.

The research primary motive was to elucidate the effects of gentrification on the Central Harlem African immigrants' community, and vindicate or partially reject the findings of previous quasi similar researches conducted in the area.

As such, the research hypothesis could prove credible, mainly because Harlem African immigrants share essentially the same socio-economic characteristics than their native-born counterparts, and are even more sensitive to economic hardship due to their overall low job skills, their often dubious immigration status, their lack of resources to integrate U.S. society and the job market—even though many west African immigrants are engaged in other jobs, the

majority of them hold low-paying ones. Furthermore, they fare poorly in finding adequate affordable housing, and regularly have limited access to social services, including health and education (Rosenbaum and Friedman, 2007).

2. Implications for Planning

The positive perception of gentrification by Harlem West African immigrants in their neighborhood could suggest that the revitalization process can be beneficial to poor and low income residents in general, and that public city officials and planners in particular could find innovative policies and planning tools to consolidate the benefits of gentrification to local traditional residents in general and mitigate the negative effects that they might suffer from the process such as increase in housing prices and rent, higher costs of living etc.

II. Literature Review

1. Introduction

A synopsis of the literature reveals that, for almost half a century, gentrification has been the subject of many passionate and polarizing debates including its very nature; the causes of gentrification, the different processes it embodies, the relationship that exists between the different actors involved in the process; the negative and/or beneficial consequences it has on the gentrified areas and their indigenous residents—often low-income/poor members of minority groups—; and the policy implications gentrification entails, especially in U.S.; Canadian; and European major urban centers, but also increasingly in the rapidly urbanizing cities in the developing world.

2. What is Gentrification?

The term “gentrification” was coined and first discussed in 1964 by Ruth Glass in her account of the “invasion” of poor working class enclaves, in central London, by new middle-class residents (Glass’ 1964: 141).

Over the past decades, the displacement process of poor workers, and the gradual change of the social character of the district she initially described came to represent a more complex urban revitalization process subject of passionate debates and studies among scholars, urban planners, policy makers, community organizers etc. They argued, disagreed and speculated on the origins of gentrification, its intrinsic nature, its causes, and mostly on its crucial role in shaping and reshaping the city’s urban forms and socio-economic configuration.

Defining gentrification still remains particularly difficult as the context in which it takes place vary considerably, and the different actors involved—mostly the economically challenged traditional residents, the new arriving “gentry”, the urban developers and city officials etc.—play different roles, and often have diverging interests (Beauregard, 1986).

Moreover, factors such as the history and social fabric of the receiving neighborhoods; the city’s primary economic functions; its place and role in the wider context of the country where it is located, the state of the country’s economy, its importance in the global economy, all these “contingent” factors contribute to the “chaos and complexity of gentrification” and to the difficulty of assigning a specific definition to the process (Smith and Williams, 1986; Beauregard, 1986).

However, as Clark argues, such a complexity should not prevent scholars and researchers to hold "onto the 'deeper more universal truth' about gentrification; in other words, the basic essences all types/forms of gentrification share" (Clark, 2005 as cited in Lees et al, 2010).

Smith argues along the same lines and places gentrification in a broader historical context one can trace back to "Engel's discussion of displacement of workers in the new industrial city and Haussmann's redevelopment of central Paris" (Smith, 1996: 34-38, as cited in Lees et al., 2010, p.5). He nevertheless insists that gentrification is a highly dynamic process that has evolved over time to espouse very complex social and economic processes that contribute to the restructuring of modern capitalist societies (Smith N. and Williams P., 1986).

Despite the absence in the literature of a clear consensus in the definition of gentrification, there are certain dimensions that "appear consistently among the different definitions" and can serve as key characteristics for an operational definition (Freeman, 2005).

For the purpose of the study, the following definition of gentrification borrowed from Lance freeman has been used: "*The process by which decline and disinvestments in inner-city neighborhoods are reversed*" (Freeman, 2005).

3. The Causes of Gentrification

Finding the causes of gentrification entails a scrutiny of both the processes through which gentrification occurs and how gentrifiers themselves act. In the literature, this view is reflected in the early ontological opposition between supply-siders and consumption-siders theorists of gentrification (Beauregard, 1986, Hamnett, 1991).

a. Supply-side/production theory of gentrification

Proponents of the supply-side theory of gentrification challenge the reliance on a shift in consumer preferences or "consumer sovereignty" alone to explain the reversal in fortune that formerly abandoned inner-city neighborhoods are experiencing. They argue that gentrifiers, namely the middle class, do not play a significant role, nor are they strictly motivated by a "rational choice" in their "Back to the City." The process of gentrification, they contend, is rather driven by *structural* processes, specifically economic and political, complex enough not to be reduced to a mere "rational choice" made by gentrifiers (Smith 1979; 1982; 1996; 2002; Beauregard, 1990). Neil Smith has been the leading theorist in the structuralist camp. His "controversial" *rent gap framework*—rent gap can be defined as the gap that exists between what a unit earns and what it can generates if put at best use—, as Lees et al. observed, has been "one of the most influential foundations of the entire gentrification literature. It connects local transformations and tensions in gentrifying neighborhoods to the broader structures of uneven urban development and the inequalities of capitalism" (Lees et al., 2010).

b. Consumption-side/rationalist theory of gentrification

Rationalist theorists of gentrification posit that the process is primarily caused by the *rational choice* consumers or gentrifiers make by deliberately moving into formerly dilapidated neighborhoods to "maximize their utility" or the preferences that guide their choice to congregate and live with other persons of the same class, social status, lifestyle etc.(Lees, 1994, 1996; Ley, 1986, 1987, 1994, 1996).

4. Gentrification and Displacement

a. Early Gentrification Studies

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, an initial "review of the evidence" (Baldassare, 1982; Clay, 1979; James, 1977; National Urban Coalition, 1978; Sumka, 1979) confirmed a nascent trend of gentrification in U.S. inner-cities—though most of the studies were performed without any "carefully constructed research designs" (Sumka, 1979).

Alongside the ontological debate and the conceptualization of the causes of gentrification, scholars looked at the effects of the process on the gentrified neighborhoods, namely the "fundamental" issue of displacement: "*the forced disenfranchisement of poor and working class people from the spaces and places to which they have legitimate social and historic claims, [which] is what constitutes and defines gentrification, with its making of space for the middle classes and the elite*" (Lees et al., 2010, p.317).

b. "The Displacement Paradigm"

Marcuse's *gentrification, abandonment and displacement in New York City*; Hartman's *Comment on neighborhood revitalization and displacement*; and Neil Smith's *New Urban Frontier* in particular set the tone—with varying arguments— for a largely-accepted "*displacement paradigm*" that accepts the reality of the displacement of traditional residents by the gentrifying middle-class moving back in previously abandoned and/or dilapidated inner-city neighborhoods ((Achtenberg and Marcuse, 1983; Hartman, 1982; Marcuse, 1985, 1986; Smith, 1996).

c. "Challenging the Displacement Paradigm"

Over the past decade, new researches challenged the "displacement paradigm" (Byrne, 2003; Freeman and Braconi 2004; Freeman 2006; McKinnish et al., 2008; Vigdor, 2002). They argue in part that the methodology used so far to measure displacement was too reductionist and "cannot be used to determine whether housing or neighborhood transitions occurred through the induced departure of low-income households or through normal household turnover or succession" (Freeman, 2005).

d. Recent Qualitative Researches Relevant to the Study

Some researchers set forth to correct the 'quantitative bias' typical of the previous studies on gentrification by adopting "socio-anthropological methodologies" that primarily look at the inner-cities' traditional communities' perceptions of gentrification in their neighborhoods (Patel, 2003; Freeman, 2006; Maurrasse, 2006).

Patel used a sample of 21 neighborhood residents in Harlem, 18 year and older who lived 3 years and more in the study area—delineated between 153rd Street and 110th Street in a North-South direction, and between Riverside Drive to Lenox in a West-East direction.

Over a period of a month, she conducted interviews asking people questions pertaining to their views of gentrification in their neighborhood. The "overall objective of her study was to-fold: 1) to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the changes taking place due to gentrification and 2) to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the changes currently underway, including overarching programs and policies, in an effort to determine what can be done in the future to satisfy an incumbent population in gentrifying neighborhoods, particularly in the case of Harlem" (Patel, 2003).

The following is a summary Patel gives of her findings:

- Most residents firmly stated that they will stay in the neighborhood. Large-scale displacement is [was] not a foregone conclusion for this population.
- The neighborhood interactions between gentrifiers and incumbent residents are [were] minimal, at best…residents generally associate with people from their own groups, either racial, or economic.
- The fact is that processes are never completely positive or negative, but rather a set of trade-offs
- The residents love their neighborhood overall, and would like to stay. What they crave is, in fact, what most people who have a place they consider to be their home desire: ownership and security (Pate, 2003, pp. 80-82).

Freeman conducted a relatively similar but larger study in two gentrifying neighborhoods in New York City, namely Harlem, and Clinton Hill in Brooklyn. He used a "non-standardized questionnaire drawn from a non-random sample of 51 persons and conducted 30 semi-structured interviews in Harlem, and 21 in Clinton Hill. Participants were all at least 18 years old, and lived in the respective neighborhoods for at least 3 years (Freeman, 2006).

As with Patel, the findings represented mixed feelings about gentrification—"welcomed by some, feared and loathed by others, and even dreaded and welcomed and the same time by the same people." Freeman's main recommendation rests on the need for good planning strategies to mitigate the probable effects of gentrification. He also insisted of the importance of community participation (Ibid).

David Maurasse conducted a similar experiment, in Harlem as well. He based his methodology on two strategies: in-depth interviews with longtime Harlem residents; he stated that such an "approach was designed to capture the nuances of how residents [were] experiencing the new and improved version of their neighborhood; and a random survey of Harlem "to complement the qualitative interviews of residents and community-based organizations (Maurrasse, 2006, p.78).

Maurrasse findings also revealed the complexities associated with the process of gentrification. The majority of the residents pointed to the positive side of the changes that were happening in their neighborhoods, specifically “new businesses and services” (Maurrasse, 2006, p. 80). They also mentioned as “their least favorite aspect of recent changes” the rising cost of living.

When asked about their opinions on the future of Harlem, a large majority also responded positively, but made a distinction between fortunes of renters and homeowners in the neighborhood. They mostly stated that the latter group had more resources to benefit from the changes that were happening (Ibid, p. 82).

These three afore-mentioned studies were groundbreaking in that they took the issue to the *people* who are primarily impacted by gentrification. Previous quantitative studies in general failed to do so, mostly because they used secondary sources to draw generalizations about a process which is fundamentally human in essence, and thus need to be understood first from a socio-anthropological point of view.

However, as much as these studies are commendable and effective in that they directly touch on the issue of gentrification from an human and ethnographic perspectives, they still heavily focused on the African American and Latino communities that are indigenous to most U.S. inner-cities, overlooking *de facto* the changing socio-cultural fabric of most gentrifying neighborhoods in major U.S. urban centers that host vibrant and demographically significant immigrant communities such as African immigrants.

5. African immigration in the United States

Many analysts trace the beginning of the large voluntary immigration of Africans in the US to the mid 1960s with the adoption by the United States of the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965, which repudiated the previous U.S. immigration quotas and restrictions for many foreign nationalities including Africans. The first sizeable wave of African immigrants however came in the 1980s and consisted of thousands of Ethiopians who fled Mengistu Haile Mariam's dictatorial Communist Military Junta, and were granted political refugee status in the U.S.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act granted "amnesty" to thousands of illegal African immigrants in the US; and the Immigration Act of 1990, since its inception, grants, every year, resident status and a path to naturalization to thousands of other immigrants—successful candidates are required to have at least a high school diploma and/or professional experience in specific areas—from underrepresented countries (in which fall almost the totality of African countries) to come to the U.S. through the diversity program, better known as the *green card lottery*. These two legislations increased considerably the presence of Africans in the United States and facilitated their legal integration.

"Since 1995 an average of 40,000 African immigrants have entered the country legally every year, but the number increased to more than 60,000 in 2002" (In Motion, 2005).

The 2010 American Community Survey (1-year estimates) estimates the total number of foreign-born Africans in the United States at 1,606,914, which is about 0.5% of the total U.S. population and 4% of the total population of foreign born in America, which is currently estimated at 39,995,673.

In New York State; New York City; and New York County (Manhattan), the number of African immigrants amount respectively to 158,878; 114,653; 17,086 (see **Table 1** for more details).

	Total Population	Foreign Born	African F. Born	% African Foreign Born
United States	309,349,689	39,955,673	1,606,914	0.5
New York State	19,392,283	4,297,612	158,878	0.8
New York City	8,175133	3,042,315	114,653	1.4
Manhattan(NYcounty)	1,586,698	451,770	17,086	1.07

Table 1: African Foreign Born Population in the US in Perspective (2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates).

III. Harlem

Harlem is a historic black neighborhood located in Manhattan—one of New York City's five boroughs. It is generally considered to stretch, in a south-north direction, for about two miles from Central Park North to 155th Street where it borders Washington Heights[1]; and in an east-west direction from the East River to the Hudson River. The neighborhood is often subdivided into three city districts: West Harlem; Central Harlem; and East Harlem. These districts correspond respectively to most of the northern part of Community Board 9; Community Board 10; and Community Board 11.

[1] In their description of Harlem Shaffer and Smith noted two particularities in the description of Harlem: "on the East Side it extends south to 96th Street while on the West Side it goes only to 125th (Schaffer and Smith, 1986).

Harlem's population[2] is estimated at half a million people with very diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, including a growing number of immigrants, mostly from Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa.

The neighborhood has experienced a shift in its racial composition over the past decade. By 2008, As Roberts noted, the share of black people "had declined to 4 in 10 residents…[M]eanwhile, the influx of non-Hispanic whites has escalated. The 1990 census counted only 672 whites in central Harlem. By 2000, there were 2,200. The latest count [last but one], in 2008, recorded nearly 13,800 (Roberts, 2010)—the chart below provide a good overview of Harlem shifting demographics up until 2006.

[2] Harlem is not recognized by the US Census Bureau as a statistical unit. The study came up with estimation by aggregating the data provided by Harlem's three Community Boards, which still use 2000 estimates.

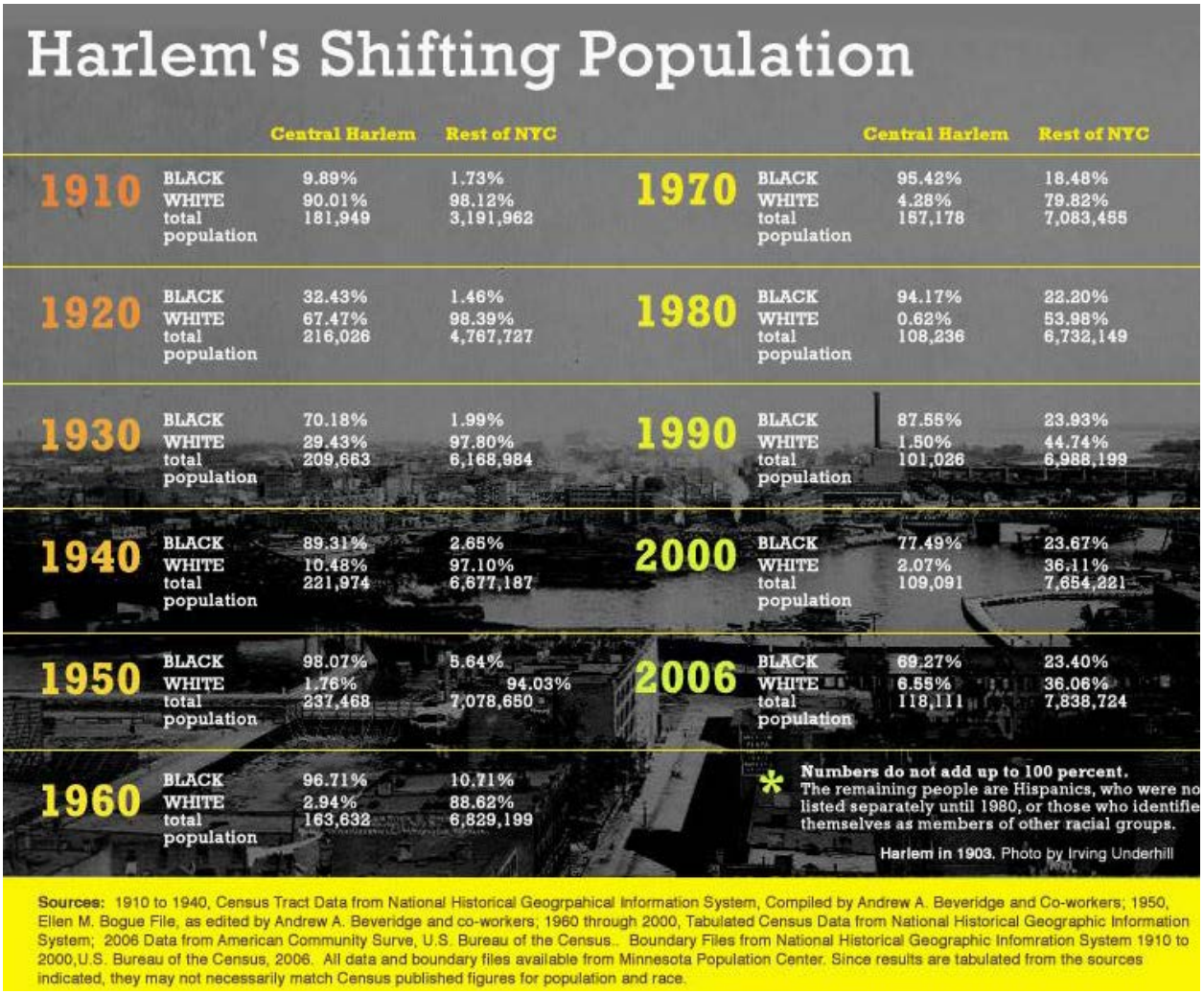
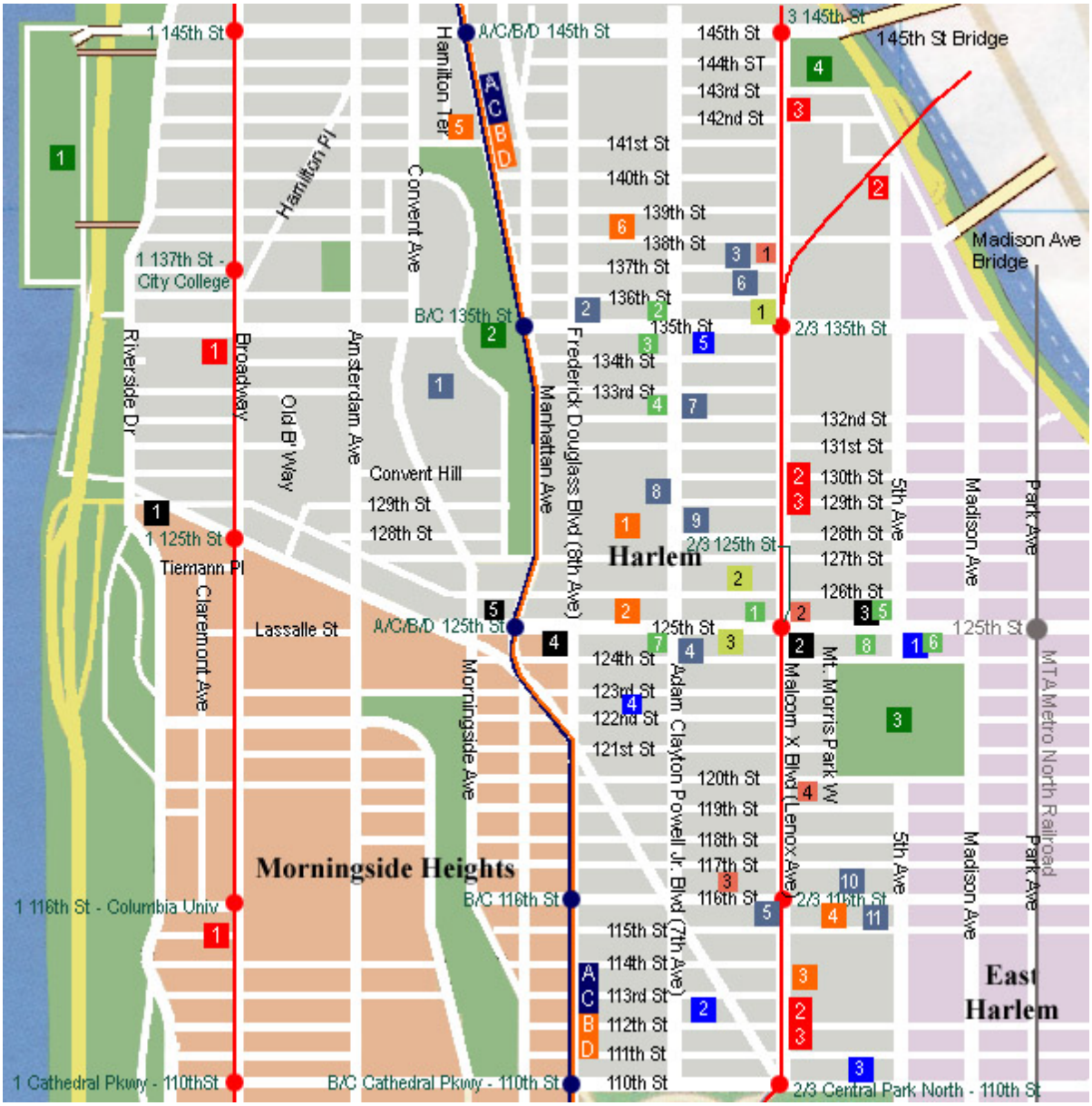


Table 2: Population and Racial Composition Harlem and New York City, 1910-2006 (Courtesy of Gotham Gazette). Accessed @http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/demographics/20080827/5/2620

Still, Harlem's distinctive black history and symbolism makes the area a uniquely important place in the hearts and minds of most Americans of African descent who often refer to the neighborhood as the "Mecca" or "Black People's Capital" where blacks of all conditions and origins have often found refuge over the centuries, have prospered and floundered, have fought for equality, justice etc. Harlem has also proved to be a place where many African immigrants settled upon their arrival in America and call the neighborhood 'home away from home.'

However, Harlem has not always been a “black” or “minority” dominated habitat, the place has a rich European history as well, which dates back to its foundation by the Dutch.



Map 1: Harlem. Courtesy of City of New York @ http://newyorkcity2005.web.infoseek.co.jp/information/maps/harlem-map.html

1. From Dutch settlement to "Black Capital of the US"

In 1658, almost fifty years after Henry Hudson—a British explorer working for the Dutch East India Company—anchored the *Half Moon* in the Lower New York Bay, "in what is now Sandy Hook" (Gill, 2011), the Dutch established a permanent settlement in Manhattan, which they named New Harlem, after Nieuv Haarlem, a town in Holland that distinguished itself through the heroism of his people, during the Eighty Years' War or Dutch War of Independence against Spain in 16th century Europe.

The settlement which was considered "vulnerable to Native American or English attack was chosen as a banner for the [Dutch] frontier community" and given such a name in remembrance of the bravery and resilience of Haarlem's citizens against Spanish invasion and oppression. In the settlement also lived the enslaved blacks who helped built the outpost. "One in five Harlem residents was black" (Moore, 2011). The town was later incorporated in New York City in 1873.

Over the three centuries that followed the establishment of Harlem until the "uptown movement of African Americans" who, prior to that, mainly lived in mid and lower Manhattan; and before the "great migration" of the late 1800s, Harlem was predominantly "white", with mostly German and Irish residents, joined in later years by Italian and Jewish immigrants (Maurasse, 2006).

As Maurasse observed, "Harlem was "New York's first suburb." Living in Harlem was considered a symbol of high status in the 1800s—a destination for the wealthy." It was not until the early years of the 20th century that African American started moving north of Central Park, from their then traditional habitats in southern Manhattan, such as the Tenderloin District, the

Seneca Village, San Juan Hill—these areas correspond today respectively to "23rd Street to 42nd Street by 8th and 9th Avenue"; "Central Park West and 80th Street; 58th to 65th between 8th and 11th Avenues" (Ibid, page 15-17)

"By 1930, Black Harlem had developed all the way down to the northern end of Central Park, with a population of two hundred thousand." *The Great Migration* and *The Second Great Migration*—which historians chronologically situate respectively between 1910-1930 and 1940-1970—of African Americans from the south to the more industrialized North of the United States, namely the Northeast and the Midwest, looking for better economic opportunities, combined with the much later afflux of African and Caribbean immigrants who "naturally" converged to culturally and racially 'friendly" neighborhoods such as Harlem, gave the neighborhood its definitive unique social fabric, and appellation of "capital of the African diaspora" (Ibid).

2. Harlem Renaissance

In the few years that followed the end of WWI, a new black middle class emerged in Harlem. Though it was still a tiny minority middle class with regard to the ocean of wealth that its white counterpart boasted, its members were better educated, better empowered economically, much more than the vast majority of Harlemites of the previous generation who were primarily pauperized former slaves, or descendants of slaves and migrants from the South. They followed the prescriptions of charismatic leaders such as Marcus Garvey, Adam Clayton Powell, Booker T. Washington etc., namely their "Buy Property" message, by acquiring real estate properties and businesses in Harlem. They managed to secure an authentically 'black space' from which they spearheaded a cultural black revolution known as the "New Negro Movement" or the *Harlem Renaissance* whereby the "New Negro" could freely express his racial and cultural pride

through various literary and artistic genres such as poetry, theatre, music, painting etc. to reaffirm their 'lost humanity' in the face of racism, discrimination and marginalization.

The Harlem Renaissance movement lasted just about a decade, until the first years of the Great Depression, but its impact on blacks in general is enduring, so is the heritage it bequeathed Harlem: the "Negro Mecca," viz. "a center of Black cultural expression," and a proud home for all Blacks.

The decades that followed the Harlem Renaissance movement confirmed the unique place Harlem holds in the History of blacks in the world, namely African Americans. The neighborhood nurtured generations of black leaders, "civil rights activists" and "freedom fighters" who went on to obtain the abolition by the United States of Jim Crow laws and the official recognition of racial equality in the United States, mostly through the adoption of the Civil Rights Act and other "progressive" laws in the 1960s.

3. The Dark Years

Unfortunately Harlem did not follow the progressive path that led to black emancipation in America and decolonization in Africa to which Harlem Renaissance greatly contributed through the influence it exerted on cultural and political movements in Africa such as *Negritude* and other various liberation and independence movements.

Economic activity dropped considerably in Harlem in the 1960s, and even decreased further in the 1980s, due mostly to "the gradually deepening of poverty." The neighborhood lost most of its businesses and its more affluent black residents progressively moved into the suburbs following the massive "white flight" (Maurasse, 2006).

Harlem became subject to huge abandonment and massive disinvestment to the benefit of American suburbs where middle class Americans increasingly sought refuge, away from wrecked inner cities, for better and safer homes and more economic opportunities.

The "crack epidemic of the 1980s and early 1990s" and its corollary, the raging gang violence and blatant insecurity that unfolded in American inner cities during the same period, finished to turn Harlem into an quasi abandoned locale solely inhabited by poor and disenfranchised American minorities and immigrants.

4. "Reviving the Renaissance"

The late 1980 and early 1990s ushered an era of economic recovery in New York City. The booming financial industry and real state market combined with the limited supply of housing units, especially in Manhattan, drove up the price of rent—by late 1990s, "the number of rental units under $400 per month decreased by 6.5 percent, and the number of those costing over $1,750 per month rose by 34 percent"—, and substantially lowered the City's occupancy rate that fell to 3.19% in 1999 (Maurasse, 2006).

The successive administrations of Dinkins and Giuliani implemented very successful security policies by hiring more police officers and by allocated more resources to New York Police Department (NYPD). In aggregate, the City became safer and people progressively moved in previously deemed dangerous and violent neighborhoods such as East Harlem, South Bronx, Bedford Stuyvesant etc. "The number of burglaries below 125th fell by 84% and rape incidence dropped by 54 percent, while the murder rate dropped 80 percent (Gill, 2011).

Population growth also contributed to the revival of Harlem. As Anthony Gill noted, for the first time since the great depression, Harlem experienced population increase. In fact, the neighborhood grew by 20%, to about 34,000 people by the end of the 1980s.

The early 1990s period marks a turning point in the history of Harlem. For the first time since the 'great flight' of middle class residents, both blacks and whites, wealthy African Americans and middle-income whites came back to live in Harlem. They bought and renovated dilapidated houses, starting the process of gentrification, especially in the Harlem western corridor (Schaffer and Smith, 1986). As noted by Maurasse, an analysis of the housing market in the area, between 1995 and 1998, reveals that:

> In 1995, 2.3 percent of all New York City mortgage loans for home improvement were in Harlem. By 1998, that figure stood at 15 percent. The number of mortgage loans made in Harlem steadily increased between 1995 and 1998. The number of African American receiving mortgage loans jumped from 144 in 1995 to 348 in 1998. Even more striking is the number of whites receiving mortgages for Harlem properties, which moved from 19 in 1995 to 107 in 1998—a 563 percent increase (Maurasse, 2006).

This trend in the revitalization of Harlem's housing stock that started in the late 1980s solidified throughout the next two decades and progressively brought strong commercial real estate development as exemplified by the creation in 1993 of the west 125th Business Improvement District (BID), which improved services and facilitated maintenance-related tasks of existing businesses along the 125th business corridor up to 5th Avenue; and also by the noted presence of commercial businesses and banking outlets that never before opened doors in Harlem. The long list of these businesses includes H&M, Marshalls, Staples, Starbucks,

Modell's, Body Shop, MAC Cosmetics, Krispy Kreme, Seaman Furniture, Bank of America, Chase, City Bank etc. (Gill,2011, p.438).

Moreover, the choice of Harlem in 1994 to be part of the six Empowerment Zones established nationwide by the Clinton administration allowed the allocation to the neighborhood of "more than $100 million in federal development funds and $250 million in tax credits." This influx of federal fund greatly impacted the development of commercial business in the neighborhood, particularly between 125th Street and 116th street where the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ) has helped fund successful business development schemes, the most successful of which has been Harlem USA, a $11.2 million investment project, "which in 2001 filled most of the block between West 124th and West 125th Streets from Frederick Douglass Boulevard [8th Avenue] to St Nicholas Avenue, with businesses including a Disney Store, Old Navy, and HMV"; let alone the well regarded Magic multiplex movie theaters owned by former Basketball star turned business guru, Magic Johnson (Ibid, p.439).

The highly publicized decision by President Clinton in 2003 to establish its quarters on 125th has been one of the most talked about episodes in the "revival of Harlem."

Moreover, it is worth noted that Columbia University's Manhattanville Project, which projects to build a new state-of-the-art seven billion dollar campus for its expansion, in the westernmost part of Harlem between 125th and 133rd —the area known as Manhattanville—, has been welcomed with divergent views. For some, it will mark the highest point in the gentrification of Harlem and usher a new era of massive displacement of its traditional residents, whereas others argue that the project will bring modernity, thousands of jobs to lift many Harlemites out of poverty and help Harlem guarantee total safety to its residents. Moreover, the

proponents of the project argue that it will definitely speed up Harlem's "incorporation" to New York City's economy and end the neighborhood's relative economic marginalization.

IV. Research Design and Methods

As already mentioned, earlier studies on gentrification of inner-city neighborhoods concluded that the process was harmful to indigenous residents who were being displaced from their traditional habitats (Achtenberg and Marcuse, 1983; Hartman, 1982; Marcuse, 1985; Smith, 1996; Newman and Wyly, 2006; Slater, 2006). Over the past decade new researches challenged such a belief and showed that displacement of traditional residents in gentrified areas was rather due to a natural displacement rate and that remaining residents were willing to deploy extra resources to stay in their homes to benefit from the positive changes happening in their neighborhoods, in terms of new services, infrastructure and other social amenities etc. (Freeman and Braconi 2004; Freeman, 2006 in particular).

The study conducted in West Harlem is part of the latest trend in qualitative studies in the field of gentrification, based primarily on observations of gentrified areas, and interviews of their traditional residents' perceptions of the process. However, the study introduced a novel variable in the methodology. It chose to involve immigrant residents, mostly from Africa, who are often considered more vulnerable than the indigenous local African American, Afro Caribbean, and Latino American communities.

The following is the study's main research question:

What are West Central Harlem African immigrants' perceptions of gentrification in their neighborhood?

The research question involved the following more specific sub-questions:

- What do African immigrants in West Central Harlem consider as the direct effects of gentrification in their lives?
- How much do they think their neighborhood change in the course of their residence, especially in terms of access to housing, services, infrastructure and other social amenities?
- How do they particularly respond to the gentrification of their neighborhood, in terms of the multitude of responses they bring to the changes that were taking place—namely housing, school for their children, access to health care, recreational activities, grocery shopping etc.?

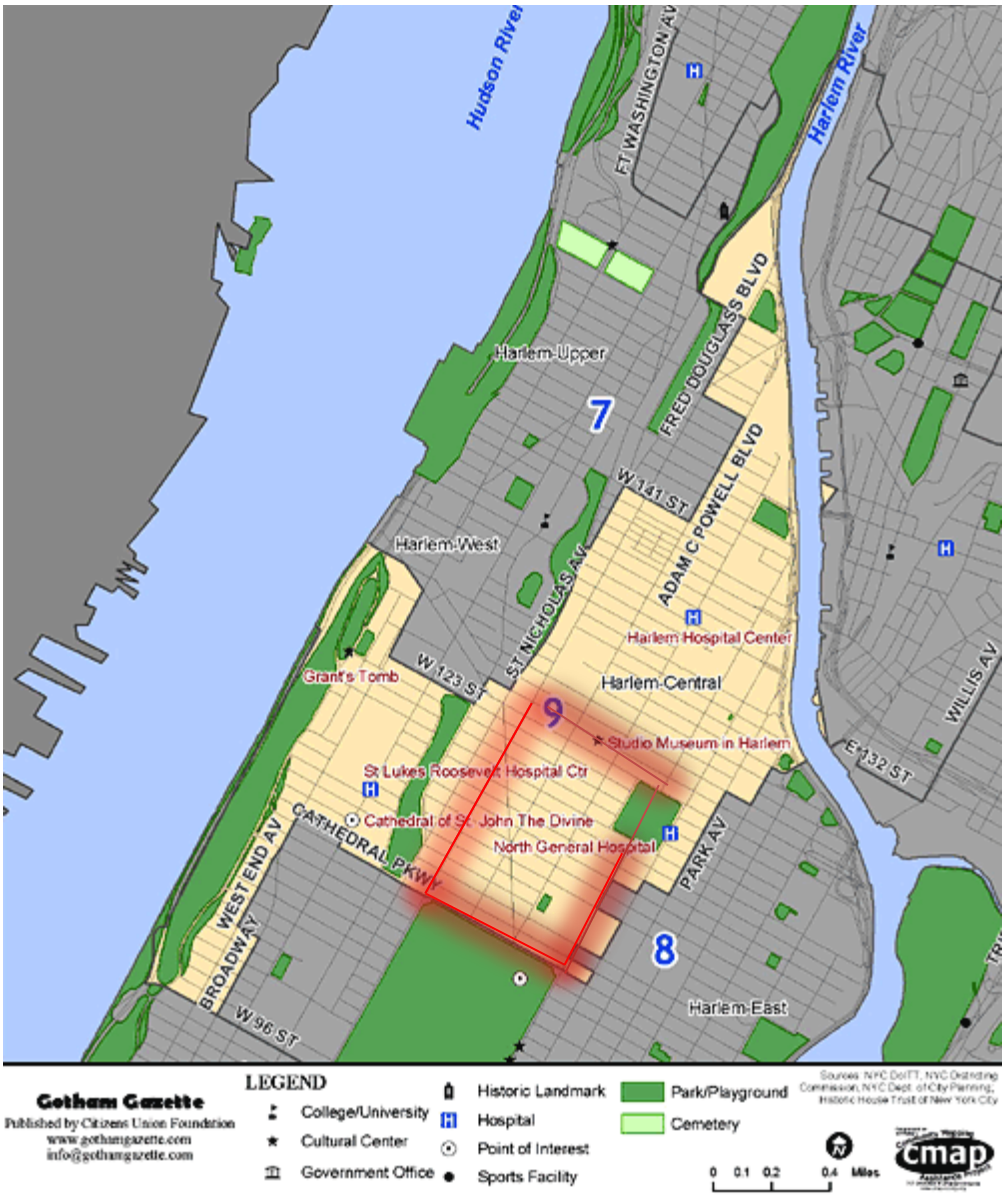
The study was conducted based on a "socio-anthropological" research model that included both primary sources and secondary sources.

The primary sources consisted of 21 formal semi-structured interviews of members of the Central West Harlem's African immigrant community having lived in the neighborhood for 5 years or more. Secondary sources were used to inform the study on the gentrification process of Harlem in general as it was first observed and studied by analysts in the early 1980's, and more recently over the last decade. Secondary sources comprised mainly of local newspapers' articles and other news publications on gentrification; national and local government documents, namely census tracts from the 2010 U.S. Decennial Census, the American Community Survey, and New York City's archives on Harlem's gentrification; academic writings, mostly scholarly articles and books written on the subject; prior studies in the field, namely observations and interviews conducted in the area by urban planning/social scientists researchers and students.

1. *Research Setting*

The research was conducted in Harlem, specifically in Central Harlem where the study area was delineated to stretch from 125th street to 110th street, in a North-South direction; and between 8th and Lenox Avenue in a West-East direction.

The choice of that segment of Central Harlem (Area in shadow in **Map 2**) was mainly motivated by the presence of a substantial number of African immigrants, namely West Africans, who are organized in a culturally and economically active community, in what has been referred to *Little Senegal* and/or *Little Africa*; but also by the highly visible physical changes in 8th Avenue and 116th street in particular, and the pressure the *125th Street Corridor Rezoning* puts on the existing affordable housing stock in the area. The proximity of Columbia University has also been a factor in the choice of the perimeter of study. That part of Central Harlem offers Columbia University's students great housing opportunities within walking-distance.



Map 2: Study Area within Central Harlem. Courtesy Gotham Gazette @ http://www.gothamgazette.com/city/district/9)

Little Senegal or Little Africa is at the heart of the study area. It is home to a considerable number of Africans in New York. Unfortunately, because the U.S. Census does not recognize Harlem or any of its three distinct districts as a statistical unit, it is difficult to accurately estimate the total number of Africans whether one focuses on Harlem in general, Central Harlem, or in the case of the study, on a specific geographical portion of Central Harlem.

However, the study managed to find estimates on the number of African immigrants in the area by the 2010 and 2009 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. These estimates are aggregates of the different census tracts that cover the study area—though some of the census tracts also straddle neighboring Community Board 9 (See **Table 3** for details on the census tracts).

Census Tracts	ACS 2009 5 years Estimates	ACS 2010 5 years Estimates
CT 190	156	129
CT 186	136	126
CT 200	58	101
CT 201.02	314	317
CT 197.02	190	126
CT 207.01	52	68
CT 209.01	93	76
CT 216	408	432
CT 218	609	593
CT 220	30	34
CT 222	78	74
Total Count	2,076	2,124

Table 3: Estimates of Africans in Study Area.

Estimates for 2010 give the number of 2,076 African immigrants living in the study area while those for 2009 are estimated at 2,124, which somehow suggests that the number of immigrant in the area has been relatively stable over the past five years.[3]

2. Sampling Strategy

During the initial design phase of the research, I first opted for a *convenience/snowball sampling* to identify the 21 local residents who would participate in the study. My strategy was to ask officials at the *Association des Senegalais d'Amerique* (ASA)—Association of the Senegalese living in America—to refer me to a certain number of fellow Senegalese, who in turn would point me to some other members of the African community until I reach the maximum number of respondents for the study.

I however realized that with such an approach the study was running the risk to focus just on the Senegalese community, and on a very limited number of people that might share the same socio-economic, cultural, religious background, and probably quasi-similar views of gentrification in their neighborhood. Moreover, such a strategy could certainly not have allowed a "varied" sample, representative of the African presence in Harlem, and would have *de facto* limited the relatively diverse views of Africans in Central Harlem on the ongoing gentrification in their neighborhood.

The two community leaders that the researcher first contacted at the local Senegalese Association office on 116th street shared a similar concerned when I explained to them the purpose of the study. When I later interviewed them in the Association's headquarters, they suggested that the study reach out to more Africans from other regions of Africa because they

[3] Estimates are probably higher as most African immigrants are suspicious about providing personal information to US officials in general, especially when they are "undocumented."

believe that most of the Senegalese and West African in the neighborhood they could think of to be part of the research would constitute a highly homogenous sample in terms of their socio-economic characteristics, and their views on the changes that have been taking place in Harlem over the past three decades when African immigrants started to settle *en masse* in the neighborhood.

Such a suggestion vindicated the researcher's fear to end up with a "biased sample." So, for the study to adopt a more "inclusive sampling," the researcher eventually decided to use a combination of *convenience sampling* and *random sampling* to identify the 21 local residents who participated in the study.

To that end he targeted several public places and businesses in Central Harlem—a couple of mosques, one on 116th street and another on the corner of 8th Avenue and 116th street, one busy African market run by Guineans at the corner of 116th and 8th Avenue, Best Yet Market at the corner of 8th avenue and 118th street where many local residents shop, a certain number of restaurants and lounges, both American and "ethnic African," located in the study area, mostly on 8th and 7th Avenue, 116th and 125th streets—where he solicited and obtained the participation to the study of a number of Africans from various economic and social backgrounds.

The 21 participants—10 women and 11 men—were primarily chosen on the basis of their status as immigrants in the U.S.A and their provenance from an African country. They all lived in the study area for 5 years or more; were 18 years of age or older; and participated in the study on a voluntary non-remunerative basis.

3. *Qualitative Data Measurement*

During the course of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher first asked respondents about their socio-economic characteristics (age, gender, matrimonial status, level of education, occupation, years of experience, country of origin, number of children, language (s) spoken etc.

These questions were necessary for a comparison of the demographic information collected during interviews with the secondary data assembled in the pre-interview phase of the research, which consist of demographic data on the designated study area, drawn primarily from the recent 2000 and 2010 U.S. Centennial Census and other recent American Community Surveys.

The interviewer then asked open-ended questions about the respondent's view of gentrification, allowing them to freely express their views on the main subject, and added other questions when deemed pertinent .

4. Data Analysis

All the interviews—except the initial two conducted in the Senegalese Association office with two members of the Association's executive bureau—took place in the respondents' homes, at the time of their choosing, and on the day they agreed to be interviewed. The interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes on average and were all recorded. A total of 10 interviews, which the researchers deemed very interesting and instructive were transcribed—2 of which (one in Wolof and the other in French) were both transcribed and translated into English. The researcher then categorized the interviews into general themes with regard to their relevance to the main research question, and then coded them based on their significance with regard the more specific questions posed to respondents.

Several excerpts that convey the most salient trends in the respondents' views were used in the final discussion and analysis of the study's findings.

V. Africans' Perspectives on Gentrification

1. *Sample Characteristics*

The interviews the researcher conducted over the course of a month yielded very interesting insights on gentrification. They revealed, in the context of Central Harlem, various perceptions on how the process is impacting the overall life of African immigrants and their families.

The Africans immigrants who participated in the study shared the same condition of immigrant in the United States, but came from various cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, and in the case of one single respondent, from a different racial background—Arab Egyptian.

10 respondents were females and 11 others males. West Africa was the most represented region in the sample with 13 people; then came Southern Africa and East Africa with 3 participants each; followed Northern Africa and Central Africa with 1 each.

The sample median age is 44, which can be explained by the stronger presence of people over 40 (11 out of 21) while just 5 interviewees were 29 or younger. The average number of year of residence in Harlem was about 16.6 years while the average length of time spent at current residence was about 8.6 years.

The majority of the interviewees consisted of married persons, all living with their spouses. They were precisely 12. Six (6) other interviewees were single and 3 other were divorced. The average number of children per participant was about 1.8.

Master's degree and Juris Doctorate were the highest education attainments recorded in the sample. One woman and a man had the lowest level of education. They reported that they just received elementary schooling in Africa before coming to the US. As expected, the average participant spoke at least three languages including English.

Businessperson/trader was the most represented occupation in the sample, followed by full time student and cab driver. One interviewee was a retiree but was still working as a volunteer community organizer.

Because the researcher knows by experience that income and money in general are sensitive issues that espouses do not necessary share in an African household, the researcher asked interviewees their average yearly salaries including any cash assistance or supplementary security income etc. instead of the usual average household income.

The sample median individual income was $25,000[4], which is a 17% differential from the New York County (Manhattan) Black or African American median income estimated at 31,802; and a 37% differential from the same estimation for New York State, which is estimated at 39,890 (2010 ACS 1 year-estimates).

Table 4 below provides more details about race and the country of origin breakdown as well as overall views of gentrification.

[4] The calculations include the null incomes of two housewives who declared that they did not have any revenues of any kind at the time of the interviews.

Codename	Country of Origin	Race	Gender	Age	Overall View of Gentrification	Years in Harlem	Years at Current residence
Ben.	Benin	Black	Male	44	Good/concerns	21	4
Burk	Burkina Faso	Black	Female	46	Good/concerns	19	12
Bur	Burundi	Black	Female	21	Good/concerns	12	12
Cong	Congo (DRC)	Black	Male	39	Good/concerns	16	4
Ivor	Cote D'Ivoire	Black	Female	33	Good/Concerns	9	6
Egy	Egypt	White/Arab	Male	29	G/strong concerns	6	3
Ghan	Ghana	Black	Male	49	G/strong concerns	27	18
Guy1	Guinea Con.	Black	Male	55	Good/concerns	25	15
Ken	Kenya	Black	Female	22	Good/concerns	14	10
Mal1	Mali	Black	Male	53	Good/concerns	25	6
Nam	Namibia	Black	Female	31	G/strong concerns	6	4
Nigel	Nigeria	Black	Female	38	Good/concerns	15	9
Sen1	Senegal	Black	Male	57	G/strong concerns	27	16
Som	Somalia	Black	Male	56	Good/concerns	26	12
Soa	South Africa	Black	Female	28	Good/concerns	5	1
Tog	Togo	Black	Female	45	Good/concerns	23	17
Zim	Zimbabwe	Black	Female	26	Good/concerns	7	2
Guy2	Guinea	Black	Male	31	Good/concerns	7	3
Mal2	Mali	Black	Male	47	Good/concerns	11	6
Sen2	Senegal	Black	Male	65	Good/concerns	28	2
Sen3	Senegal	Black	Female	50	Good/concerns	19	18

Table 4: Views of Gentrification and key Socio Characteristics

Table 5 below summarizes respondents' marital status and number of children in household; education attainment and current profession or occupation; average yearly salary and languages spoken.

The coding of the interviews revealed several gentrification-related topics that are of great concern to participants. The following list constitutes the most salient themes participants discussed with the interviewer: Africans' perceived role in the "revitalization" of Harlem (past and present); appreciation of current safety and "convenience of life" in Harlem; housing and accommodation for African immigrants and their families, namely security of tenure, rent prices, fear of displacement; access to education and health services; cultural and religious facilities for the African immigrant community, namely mosques, churches, Dahiras (Islamic schools) etc.; race/culture relations; social capital and community life; access to capital and credit for local businesses; Harlem as a "cultural asset" for black people.

#	Codename	Matrimonial	# Children	Edu.	Occupation	Salary Estimate/Year in $
1	Ben.	Single	0	Assoc. D.	Comp. Tech	25,000
2	Burk	Married	3	H. sch. D.	Housewife	None
3	Bur	Single	0	Student/Jn.	Student/Jn.	5,000
4	Cong	Married	2	High sch.	Hotel Clerk	15,000
5	Ivor	Married	3	B.A.	Bus. owner	60,000
6	Egy	Single	0	B.S.	Accountant	30,000
7	Ghan	Divorced	1	M.S.	Comp. Eng.	70,000
8	Guy1	Married	5	Elementary	Bus. owner	70,000
9	Ken	Single	0	Student/Jn.	Student/Jun.	5,000
10	Mal1	Married	4	High Sch.	Cab Driver	40,000
11	Nam	Single	0	B.S.	Fin. Officer	45,000
12	Nigel	Married	1	Juris D.	Lawyer	80,000
13	Sen1	Married	1	Male	Com.Org. (Ret.)	15,000
14	Som1	Married	4	High Sch.	Cab Driver	50,000
15	Soa	Single	1	B.A.	Stud./Grad	7,000
16	Tog	Married	3	High Sch.	Housewife	None
17	Zim	Single	0	B.A.	Stud. /Grad.	9,000
18	Guy2	Married	0	Elementary	Butcher	15,000
19	Mal2	Married	2	High Sch.	Str. Vendor	20,000
20	Sen2	Married	3	B.A	Com. Org. /Bus. owner	50,000
21	Sen3	Married	4	Female	Bus. owner	70,000

Table 5: Other Key Socio-economic Characteristics

This list is not exhaustive and the issues it comports overlap often and always come back to the principal issue of gentrification and also to that of the respondents' "immigrant condition," viz., how they conduct their life in the U.S., and how they are constantly looking for opportunities and substantial resources to support their families—understood both in the nuclear, and in the broader "communal sense."

With a view to narrow down the interviewees' concerns to a few salient issues, the researcher grouped them into the following key themes, which will be discussed more in details in the next chapter. These key themes are as follows:

- The meaning of gentrification for most African immigrants
- The perceived role of blacks in general and African immigrants in particular in the gentrification of Harlem
- Fear of displacement
- Affordable Housing
- Jobs and economic opportunities.
- The future of Africans in Harlem

2. Perceptions of gentrification

a. *'An interview is worth a thousand regressions'*

This paraphrase of "a picture is worth a thousands words" came straight to the researcher's mind as he began to conduct the interviews and was increasingly being comforted in the general belief that asking directly people their opinions on a crucial research subject such as gentrification is a powerful research tool. Not only was there a direct cognitive connection with both the topic of

interest and the study's participants, but there was also a live production of invaluable data no content analysis or archival research could ever have produced.

This experience was all the more informative that each critical insight that the interviewees raised could in itself be the starting point for a new conversation and the prospect for future research. That also made the research process an interactive and deeply engaging one.

b. Still Baffled…

Over the past seven months, the researcher himself had relentlessly grappled with the notion of gentrification, particularly what it meant for Harlem and what the study would actually mean for the select residents. Despite this inner theoretical dilemma the researcher made sure to explain to all participants, as early as in the recruitment phase, what the study was trying to accomplish, using the operational definition borrowed from Freeman as basic explanation of gentrification—the definition mainly poses gentrification in terms of reinvestment in a formerly disinvested inner-city neighborhood like Harlem.

Still, many participants asked the researcher what gentrification was actually about in the specific context of Harlem. Others were simply quite surprised that some people could still try "to look at the obvious."

c. Why "look at the obvious?"

When I asked *Sen2* what he thought about the changes that were happening in Harlem and the fact that businesses and people were more and more interested in Harlem in general, he first grinned and then asked me with a serious voice: why would researchers bother to look at gentrification in Harlem while it is all clear that it is now a reality and that it is here to stay?

Before I could tell him that I was not necessarily looking at evidence of gentrification, but that I was rather trying to listen to people in his neighborhood and ask them their inner thoughts about gentrification, he quickly reordered his thoughts and offered the following rather unexpected remarks:

> Listen, I really don't know the true meaning of gentrification but if it is about new flourishing businesses and fancy and expensive apartments; it is here already, with white people coming more and more too. Ok, if it is that, you don't need to do research. Do you really need to talk to people to know that Harlem has changed a lot and is still going through a lot of changes? Just look at the number of Starbucks you have here and the fancy restaurants, the wines stores, not bodegas or old liquor stores, real wine stores. There is one right here, on 116th. Look at the lounges on 8th Avenue. These are only found in areas where rich people live. They are inseparable companions to white folks; they go hand in hand like sugar and milk. *Lu ni Fang kenn du ko jeex* [trans.: You don't look at the obvious].

Sen2 thoughts were very important for my personal perception of the participants' neighborhood and how much I would assess the magnitude of the changes that people have been witnessing, and how much they came to accept it as part and parcel of their life to a point that they seem surprised that other people could still want to find proof of that.

d. First impression: safety and "convenience of life"

In the aggregate, and despite some concerns that they raised about increasing rent prices, the possibility of displacement and their future in the neighborhood, all my interviewees did appreciate the changes Harlem have been going through, especially the much-appreciated sentiment of safety and security that residents in the neighborhood were enjoying, especially for those who lived here long enough to remember the "dark days" when Harlem was a haven for gangs and drug dealers, and when no day went by without killings, rape, gun shots and all the manifestations of violence and permanent danger that one can see in unsafe neighborhoods.

Moreover, all my interviewees pointed to what one can call "convenience of life," understood as a more comfortable and convenient life that Harlem residents could enjoy because of the growing presence of new "amenities," namely good and healthy restaurants and eating places, shops, movie theaters, laundromats, dry cleanings, banks etc. They mainly pointed to the example of 8th Avenue, which they see as a nice and convenient neighborhood, filled with lively businesses and services, which they hope will soon extend to the whole of Harlem.

I asked *Mal1*, a Malian former street vendor turned cab driver who lived 25 years in Harlem, how much he thought Harlem had changed over the past years, and how much of a difference it makes in the life of someone like him who lived in Harlem for so many years. He genuinely looked surprised and stared at me as if I were a Martian "fresh from the saucer."

> Ali, I see that you do not know Harlem. Do don't now how it was here before. If you knew, you would just look at 125th Street and at the stores that opened there, most of them would swallow half of what I make a month in a few minutes shopping. You could not find these shops here a few years ago. Harlem is great now. Even Clinton [former President Clinton] is here now. There is security here now and houses are still cheaper than almost everywhere else rich people live. Trust me, I drive a cab, I know where rich people live in Manhattan. [He started laughed] Twenty years ago when you saw a white person walking freely in some dangerous parts of Harlem, you could be sure, if he was in plain clothes, that he was an undercover agent or some careless French tourists. You know French people are comfortable with blacks in general. Maybe it has to do with their colonial past and the massive presence of immigrants among them. You know my parents [he meant Malians in general] live there in great numbers, yours too [Senegalese in general]. [He starts laughing even louder and continued] Or be sure that it was a white person who wanted to kill himself and was not courageous enough to do it on his own [he added that he was joking]. Now just look at the pedestrian traffic. Whites are comfortable now in Harlem. Look at the Metro. Look at the number of whites who get off at 125th. Now you can see them partying on 8th Avenue and they seem relaxed. I am kind of fine with that because wherever they go the police follows. And I can tell you, feeling safe is good. I like that.

Tog, a Togolese housewife in her late 30s, mother of three, who came here in the late 80s to join her husband shared her excitement about living a much more comfortable and relaxed life now as compared to when she first arrived in Harlem, especially with regard to the safety of her children. She told me:

> I was lucky. My husband brought me here in 1988. Just two years after he got his papers. I was lucky to be with him away from the constant pressure his family exerted on me while he was here. I brought along my three-year old son. I was scared all the time, my husband worked too much and I was always alone in the house. When my son started to go to school I was even more scared. I had to pick him up at the school and I would spend the last hour before the end of his class waiting at the school door. I did not speak English at all, and at the school they thought I was crazy. I had to explain with great difficulty that I was afraid for my son. Now I have two young daughters that go to school. I don't worry to much for their safety. [Laughs] I even sometimes forget when they should come back from school. It is so much better. There are crossing guards everywhere and police officers are always patrolling in the neighborhood. I really like to live in Harlem now. Masha'Allah[5], it is more expensive now but we have peace of mind and my kids like it too. My husband is very brave and I think he also gets help from the city for the rent. I pray that we stay here. My only problem is health. I have diabetes and I have to go to Harlem Hospital which is a little bit far for me because my feet hurt all the time. If I had a hospital near the house, life would be even better.

These two insights, beyond their anecdotal character convey well the magnitude of the physical changes that Harlem has been experiencing. They also show how longtime residents who lived through these changes are quite satisfied with them and even show surprise when others do not realize the depth of the neighborhood's transformation, and how it has a new comforted "feel," especially in terms of security and convenience.

[5] "**Masha'Allah** is an Arabic phrase that expresses appreciation, joy, praise or thankfulness for an event or person that was just mentioned (Wikipedia)."

However, it is important to note that the appreciation of gentrification and the recognition of the positive changes it brought in Harlem is more pronounced among relatively older participants, who all happened to have lived in Harlem for more than 25 years, and can tell the difference when the place was “hell” and now that people barely pay attention to safety, especially the younger generations of residents, which as Sen2 put “take peace and security in most of Harlem for granted.”

Longtime residents, namely whose who lived in Harlem for twenty years and more tend to see gentrification much more positively, even if they also emitted some concerns with regard to issues such as housing, possibility of displacement, rising cost of living and their future in the neighborhood.

Their views are relatively different from that of the much younger segment of the study’s sample of which there are 4 students (2 undergraduates who still live with their parents; and 2 graduates students who are in school in the CUNY system); and 4 other professionals and business owners, of which, one is an Ivorian woman who owns a very successful garment and cosmetics business on 7th Avenue, an accountant from Egypt, a Nigerian lawyer; and a financial officer originated from Namibia.

These Africans are all in their late twenties and early/mid thirties and have a slightly different view of gentrification, not on its positive side, which they did acknowledge and appreciate, but in terms of how the process might, in near future, impacts their life in Harlem.

Their views reflect in general a certain hiatus that exists between the younger African residents who are either students or young professionals and usually live with other roommates,

or in the case of two of the youngest participants, with their parents with whom they came to the U.S. at a relatively young age.

e. Africans' understanding of gentrification

Early in the study, mostly during the selection process, several future interviewees asked what gentrification meant and how it was understood within the framework of the study.

The theoretical approach the study adopted was deliberately not posing the issue of gentrification in terms of displacement, but rather in terms of "reinvestment" in Harlem, which was a way of using a "neutral" definition of the process that would not "pollute" the participants' personal views on gentrification and most likely turn their whole attention towards the contentious issue of displacement, and probably omitting other interesting aspects of gentrification they might also want to share.

However one could still sense a sentiment of discomfort, though mostly unspoken, that they had with the research's theoretical framework—especially after they asked about the meaning of gentrification and given the usual explanation—,which in their own accounts could be primarily seen as having to do with the resources that were deployed to change the general physiognomy of Harlem than the actual consequences the subsequent changes they caused had on their own lives.

Nigel for example agreed that the ongoing gentrification of her neighborhood has brought considerable financial and business investments, which translated into the perceptible physical changes one can easily see in her neighborhood. She added that, it is good that people are showing more confidence in the area and that she hopes that such investments will continue.

“Whether you live here for thirty years or you moved here after school or for work, one should be proud to be part of the new face of Harlem.”

However, for her the crucial issue remains, as she put it: “how can people who lived in Harlem or would like to live in Harlem, people of all colors and breeds, can afford to do so without compromising the ability of the “indigenous community to remain here?”

Nigel argued that when one talks about gentrification in Harlem, the first thing one should have in mind is the future of black residents, especially those who lived here for many years and now might be worried to have to leave Harlem because they would not be able to sustain the “pace of change”, or rather not be able to pay the price to “benefit from the changes.”

Niguel thinks that it is where the real question lies, and that gentrification means just that and should be understood that way. The details on how gentrification happens and who are the gentrifiers are of no interest to her. He believes that it is a tangible reality, with palpable consequences. She added that despite the fact that she was in good and sound financial standings, and could afford to pay her rent thanks to her good education and current job, she was “feeling the pain” of many people in the community she knew, including close friends of hers, who would spend more than they really can afford to stay in their homes, with just enough left to fend for themselves and for their families.

This interesting reflection by Nigel on the increasing cost of rent and costs of living in general in Harlem has been at the heart of the concerns raised by the African immigrants who participated at the study. The issue was actually the most recurrent one in the interviews.

For these Africans, the matter was intrinsically linked to their own intimate understanding of gentrification, how they conceptualize the process when sharing their insights

during the interviews. It is also linked to their perceived role in the gentrification of Harlem. Could they be viewed as "gentrifiers" or not, especially for the most affluent among them like Nigel, who by all standards was financially much more better off than the great majority of the neighborhood "indigenous" residents. This became all the more interesting when all the interviewees were strongly anchored in the belief that Harlem was quite a unique neighborhood where blacks in general ought to have a privileged status and therefore should be able to remain.

f. Harlem: "a uniquely black neighborhood"

During the entire interview process, the study's participants, especially the older segment of the sample—45 and older—made of those who lived in Harlem for a relatively long period of time, usually for more than twenty years, insisted that people should make a sharp distinction between gentrification itself—the revitalization process whereby the neighborhood attracts business investors, becomes suitable for a "better" and "safer" living, attracts more business investors, and new richer residents—and the notion of "revival" or "reconstruction," which they argued, was more meaningful and most appropriate when describing the "new face of Harlem."

They pointed out that Harlem's revival has been a much longer process, done over several decades, and that the recent visible transformation of the neighborhood is the latest stage in such a long process. Such a revival they said was inevitable. It had a cultural, racial and historical significance, and had to be spearheaded by blacks of all origins and status for the neighborhood to regain its unique place in black culture and history.

Moreover, for the study's participants, most Harlem's "newcomers"—in "newcomers" they did not mean people who just moved in Harlem, they spoke instead of people who did not understand the condition of being black in America and how such a condition is intrinsically

linked to living in such black historical places like Harlem—were considering the idea of Harlem as a center of Black culture as something from a distant nostalgic past.

Some interviewees argued that these newcomers instead see the neighborhood as a relatively cheaper place of residence, with good potential for growth; a place relatively close to their daily activities; a place which, in a near future, could be close to their own idea of an ideal home, in a city they cherish, but where homes are increasingly expensive, and sometimes out of the reach of many middle class and even some fairly rich people.

In the same line of argument, Sen2 told me that the revival of Harlem was embedded in the sum of the residents' respective lives, and that the resilience, patience and faithfulness they showed vis a vis Harlem had made them worthy of rewards. For him the simplest of the reward was the ability for longtime residents to keep their houses.

As blacks, he continued, which is the category most people in the United States think of them first before possibly mentioning their condition of immigrant, he believes that it is quite normal for most of them to:

> believe that Harlem is truly black and should remain predominantly black. Not necessarily in number, but in culture and as a place of key historical importance to all blacks where they should have the first word in the orientation the neighborhood should take. And don't tell me that we are not American, and therefore we should be excluded in the debate. Harlem is for all blacks, even for we who were not born here, this is our home. We sacrificed to have this place look like this today. In the past we were dying in total indifference when we first arrived here because black Americans did not know us, young gang members killed a lot of Africans, many among les *anciens* [literally, the senior], sometimes for a warm jacket or some insignificant cash, sometimes for women-related issues.
>
> We at that time had often to live together in great numbers in dilapidated houses or in hostels to feel safe. Now that you are better known by our "cousins" and better integrated in the American society, and that the place where we have been living for about thirty years is the subject of all desires, we should be given especial treatment. People fled Harlem when the neighborhood needed them the most only to come back to reap the fruit of the labor and sacrifice of those who stayed in here—even though we stayed here because we did not have the choice, at least we did. I am not saying that only us should live here, but we should be given respect and more help to stay in our community. I would feel lost if I had to find myself in the Bronx, Brooklyn or Queens after almost 28 years spent here. Thank God, I am retired now and I go back and forth between New York and Senegal. I could always stay with my son or some other friends if I did not have a place of my own. But some others do not have that choice. They don't have papers to travel or don't have enough money.

These heartfelt insights touched on the unique affective and emotional relationship many immigrants, especially the old ones have with Harlem, which they consider as an authentic black neighborhood and their home in America. It also raises the interesting question of the role blacks in general and Africans in particular think they play in the gentrification of Harlem.

g. Blacks and Africans in Harlem: "Gentrifiers" or "Revivers"?

Several studies have shown that blacks have contributed and still contribute to the gentrification of many previously bighted, abandoned and poor inner city neighborhoods (Lees,

2000; Boyd, 2005; Moore, 2009), and Harlem is typical of the traditional American inner city previously abandoned in favor of suburbs.

However, the theoretical framework on which these studies have been built, namely the various definitions or perceptions of gentrification that one can see throughout the literature is somehow different from the one that transpired from the interviews.

In the light of the personal insights I obtained from interviewing African immigrants in Central Harlem, affirming the reality of the existence of black gentrifiers, and thus of African gentrifiers in Harlem can be a very complex and uneasy theoretical and even empirical exercise. In reality, many Africans, including the ones I talked to in Central Harlem have specific views of gentrification and do think of a different role they play in the gentrification of Harlem, which they rather explain as "revival," or reconstruction of their own habitat, which they believe is quite different from gentrification, which is an impersonal, distant and mechanical process that does not proceed from a deliberate and spontaneous desire to rebuilt, revitalize a place one considers historically and culturally black.

This is the view expressed by Som, a 56 year old Somalian cab driver who lived in Harlem the entire time he spent in the U.S. He told me in a very solemn way, how much he was attached to Harlem, and how happy he was to see the neighborhood being populated by all kinds of people, rich, poor, young, old, blacks, Asians, whites etc., in less that a thirty year span.

He, however, took the time to emphasize the important role, in his eyes, immigrants played in the transformation of the neighborhood. He told me that such a role should not go unnoticed or unappreciated, and that the best way to honor them is that Harlem retain its "black

character" and always offer blacks of all horizons the opportunity to live here. These are his words rendered at length:

> You know, when I first got here, I was supposed to join some fellow countrymen in St Paul. I landed in New York and instantly loved the City. I stayed with a friend of mine who welcomed me in his house in the East Side. Very dangerous place then. It was in the mid 1980s. I shared his place for a year and started to do things on my own, living a few blocks away. That Harlem was the Harlem where everyday could be the last day of your life. Drugs, gangs and violence were everywhere, I was working as a busboy in some restaurant in Midtown, and I had late shifts, every commute home could have been the last. Today, you see young immigrants, young Africans take Harlem for granted. It is the same with young people when they see a Black president. You had to be here to appreciate what Harlem has become now. It is true that we all want to stay here, we deserve it, many immigrants have been killed because they dare stay here, work and show gang members that you could live here and have a normal life. I would really want people to show appreciation for what African have accomplished. But for that we need unity, we need to have strong lobbies like Spanish [sic] and force that appreciation, show people that we have been the first to move here, stay here until other got convinced that Harlem was just like any other neighborhood which needed security, cleanliness and good people willing to live here in peace.

As I could sense the emotion in his voice, I thought he could share other interesting stories right from his heart. I then I tried to ask what he thought about the term Harlem "gentrifier", a richer middle class person moving into Harlem. He automatically went off without hesitation:

> How did you say it, gentrifier? Hum. Ok, these new residents, let's say are richer people who come to live in Harlem because the place is fine now. These people just want to live somewhere decent, not "crazy expensive" like Tribeca or the Upper East Side.
>
> Anyway, you can call them whatever you want, but as far as Harlem is concerned they are welcome, especially because they bring safety and peace here. That is excellent, but they cannot be more valorous than people like me. We "did gentrification", or whatever you called it with our blood and sacrifices, we transformed Harlem, not because we had the money to invest here, not because we could tell the Mayor, listen we are gonna pay you good taxes, so, protect us and bring the cops and we will have plenty of people like us here to change Harlem for good. No, we came here and challenged the belief that Harlem was a bad place. It is true that we did not have much of a choice in terms of where to live those days. But, we were brave and hard working. We worked low-paying jobs, but lived a peaceful and decent life. You know, it is what made people think twice about immigrants. They said, if these African can make it here, why not give it a chance. So richer African American came back, and whites followed. So we are the true heroes, we are no gentrifiers as you called it. You do not stay in your own house which is crumbling down without doing anything, hoping to see other people come and fix it for you. They would take it from you if you allow that to happen. You stay in there until you can rebuild it, and if other people like where your house is, they can come and live next to you, but they should respect the fact that you are the owner and chief in your house and that you are the one who gave them confidence to live where you live. Harlem is ours, it is for black people first. Others that want peace and security can come and live with us, but it is not fair to take it from us.

I chose to cite this excerpt at length also because it perfectly conveys what almost all the participants told me when I asked them about their role in the gentrification of Harlem, using specifically the term gentrifier, which I explained as a middle class person moving to a neighborhood such as Harlem, which was previously abandoned by both many businesses and people in favor of other places such as the suburbs.

This time, the responses were almost unanimous, not varying across age or profession. Even the younger generation, people in the sample aged thirty or less, agreed that Africans and

black people in general cannot be really called gentrifiers because they were living here in the first place. They were the ones living in Harlem when it was "rough," and they changed the perception of the neighborhood in the eyes of many others.

Soa, a South African graduate student in history and African studies, a bit of an activist and very nervous about the future of Harlem and its black residents addressed me in these terms:

> I am not talking about the Harlem of the 1800s, but the Harlem of Black people, the Harlem filled with poverty, abandoned filthy houses, poor health conditions etc., and from that period on, there has been a continuation in "black occupancy." I was not here but my father lived here thirty years ago, and he still talk about the Harlem of the eighties as being worst than our Bantustans during the fiercest days of Apartheid. What is happening here now is revival, a renaissance of another kind. You know, I don't like the term gentrification; it has a negative and detached connotation.
>
> Tell me how much can we gentrify Harlem? How much better off do you think we black middle class are compared to the poorest among us? Not much. I can assure you that the majority of blacks who live here or are looking to stay in Harlem do not make such a difference in how many of the longtime residents will stay or not. What is needed is protection, policies and measures that will help the most vulnerable among us keep their houses. Whites can come, but they will compete among them to live in expensive new developments. If there are blacks capable to compete with them, it is fine, but the majority of us, are looking for places that are affordable, we ain't no gentrifiers or disrupters or whatever you guys wanna call it.

Ben, a 44 year old computer maintenance technician argued practically the same when he told me that it is totally irrelevant and unfair to call gentrifier a black person who dared come back to a violent and dangerous neighborhood such as Harlem about two decades ago, who set the example for other much wealthier blacks to come and give their "brothers and sisters" a sense of confidence that they can live a peaceful and better life in Harlem.

When I wanted to explain to him that "gentrifier' was more an economic category than a racial one he counterattacked and told me that such an argument was not tenable because in the USA economic categories were mainly drawn along racial lines. For him, even though some blacks were very rich and could be called gentrifiers if they moved to Harlem and buy a place where other poor people lived for years, such cases are not the norm, and that as for black middle class, they were fundamentally different from their white counterparts who often have more assets, are better abreast of the fluctuations of the housing market, and are thus more privileged when it comes to access to housing.

Coming back to the specific case of the African immigrant, he said:

> As an African, and a migrant, I am seen as being at the bottom of the social ladder in America. Even the very small number of African immigrants that struck it rich here or came to the USA already rich, the vast majority of them does not have a great choice of where they can live in New York. The housing market here is not the one in Dayton Ohio or Kansas City, Missouri [he told me that he had family in both places], it is tough. Look, the first generation of immigrants in New York had no choice than to stay in dangerous neighborhoods such as Harlem where many of them died, killed by gangs, sometimes by police, but they still stayed. It has always been easy for us to stay in Harlem, parts of Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx than to find a place in midtown. So, you see, we have always live here and I don't think that you can gentrify the place where you already live. You might have "gentrifiers" among wealthy or middle class African American but you can barely call African immigrants gentrifiers even though some of us do pretty well, and you also have some young professionals and students among us, but it is very difficult for them to move in Harlem if they did not live here before. And that is because there are not many affordable houses in Harlem these days. Those who move in here have more money and can afford to live on 8th Avenue for example. Those places are very expensive, more than what most of us can afford or would be ready to pay for a decent house.

h. Fear of Displacement

As one could see from the interviews, housing is a huge preoccupation for African Immigrants in Harlem. When one thinks that any person's first step towards immigration is to leave one's home, family, country, friends etc. to look for new and better opportunities, build a new life and help people one left behind, it is quite understandable that African immigrants in Harlem have such crucial preoccupations as decent accommodation, security of residence, jobs etc., at the center of their existence.

People who usually arrive in a foreign country always need to first have a *pied-a-terre,* a good accommodation to settle down, have their feet on the ground, and get acclimated with their new environment before looking for a job or any remunerative activity, and it is what a decent house offers.

As Sen1 told me, it is only when you have a place where you can rest after work or a long day of "trying hard" that you can think of new ways to ameliorate your condition in your host country. He explained to me that when he first arrived in NYC in the mid 1980s, "there was room for almost the entire population of Dakar [Senegal's capital and most populous city] to live in Harlem. There were so many abandoned and vacant houses that accommodation was not really a problem." The problem he added, "was where one could live and survive the insecurity and the cold winter weather as many houses like the one most of his Senegalese friends occupied were not fully "functional" all year long.

He told me that he instead opted to stay at the *Park View Hotel,* a derelict and filthy one-single-room occupancy hotel located at 55 West 110th Street—know also as *Le Cent Dix* (Hundred Ten in French)— where many Africans lived and had to pay their rooms by the day. It

is much later that he could live in a normal house when he met his first wife, an African American woman who had a decent place in the vicinity of 110 and 7th avenue.

For many Africans, housing is also a source of pride and security. Nig, a housewife in her mid 30s explained to me how she had to wait for years back home until she could reunite with her husband because he was living with other people in an overcrowding house where women were not allowed. Not that they did not want any women among them, but their promiscuous living conditions could not allow the presence of any woman. The reunification with their wives depending largely on how fast they could "file" for them to get them immigrant visas, but also on their ability to find a decent apartment to live with their espouses upon their arrival in New York.

The importance accommodation and housing have in the life of immigrants in general explains well the fear they have of losing their houses, especially in an environment where rent prices are increasingly high, and one in which the overwhelming majority of Africans in New York do not own their homes. It is no surprise that none of the participants owns their house, and all raised loudly the fear of somehow having to move from their current residence.

One of the community organizers who has been reunited with his family for over two decades now, and who still live in a City subsidized apartment in Central Harlem—part of his rent is paid by the city—,told me how much housing in New York has become a nightmare for many of his fellow countrymen. He explained to me that some Africans were constantly harassed by landlords not to renew their leases when they come into expiration.

According to him, there were even extreme cases where his Association had to help some desperate residents get legal help to keep their leases. He spoke of a very interesting case of one of his friends who was given a $40,000 check to vacate his apartment when the lease ended. He

swore that he himself saw the check with his own eyes. His friend ended up accepting the offer and moved out of Harlem and started a business. But he assured me that he is still looking to come back to Harlem, which is the place he is used to, where his friends are, and where he could find all the right amenities to feel really comfortable in New York.

Another Senegalese whom I did not interview but who was present on the premise where the interview took place explained to me how their landlord refused to renew their lease when it came into expiration; they had to settle the issue at court, with the judge ruling in their favor. He was not very much pleased with the landlord, whom they dealt with for more than twenty years, and who showed a deep sense of ingratitude towards them, especially because they helped him make more money than he was expecting for the place after he saw how they split the apartment in several separate rooms, which he replicated, but never showed appreciation about it, and also for having serious and responsible tenants who never brought him trouble and never missed a single payment.

All these stories show how much sensitive the issue of housing and the related issue of fear of displacement is.

On one instance the issue even brought discomfort from the part of the interviewer, namely when one of the female participants who is a relatively successful young financial officer, told me outright that he would do anything to land a decent place in Harlem, even “get physically involved” with whomever could help her with that.

This did not mean that she could not find a place to live in New York. She has actually been living in a nice, but small studio, paying about $1,100 a month. She, in fact loved the convenience of her place, and the happiness being in Harlem was bringing into her life,

especially in terms of easy commute to her workplace in Mid-Manhattan, but she still found the place too small for the standard of life she thought a woman of her education and social status deserves.

She then unexpectedly went into a rant against the city officials who according to her "haven't done anything to pressure developers not to speculate with housing in Harlem, and who in the same vain were not helping Harlem's community boards mobilize their residents, including poor longtime residents, and especially blacks who are not usually well educated or informed with regard to social services, and particularly on the crucial issue of affordable housing."

She also told me that her category of residents, young professionals in particular, and the growing number of students in Harlem are not being taken seriously by the City. Even though some see them as gentrifiers in the same way than more affluent middle class people who are moving into Harlem in great numbers, her category she said, was the future of Harlem because they bring a racial and ethnic diversity that will stabilize the gains in security and "convenience of life" that Harlem has obtained over the last decades, which is totally different from the effects richer gentrifiers could have on the "traditional" Harlem community, including African immigrants.

According to her, her social category, all races included, has an economic and financial situation that does not greatly vary from the traditional indigenous residents of Harlem, who for the same reason will not suffer "up pricing" and high rents and other negative effects, and could therefore, with the help of the City, afford to stay in their homes.

Nam concluded that Harlemites should *en masse* call upon politicians and City officials to do something about rent in particular.

In the final analysis, for most people, gentrification does not necessarily mean direct displacement. For them, it is primarily something very close, namely the rising cost of rent, which could definitely lead to displacement if not addressed properly by the City.

That could explain in part why most of the older people I interviewed were not as much concerned with displacement as were most of the younger people in the sample. They actually seem to be totally content with the positive changes Harlem were going through as long as they could keep their leases in rent-controlled/stabilized apartments.

As for the younger generation, which seemed to be more anxious about access to housing in general, their main concern was primarily about finding ways to get a decent and not-so-expensive place in Harlem, which brings to mind the key issue of affordable housing.

i. Affordable Housing

Affordable housing in New York has been the subject of passionate and endless debates in City Hall, among policy-makers, academic, urban planners, community organizations and their respective constituencies. In Harlem, which is part of the Borough of Manhattan, one of the most expensive real estate in the world, the limited availability of houses, the high rate of renters—which is 93.4 in Central Harlem according to 2000 estimates—, coupled with the high density of population, all of these factors have brought about a sharp increase in rent and the price of housing in general.

For years now, the City has been implementing a number of housing policies to help its poor and low-income residents have access to decent housing. In the context of Harlem where

most of the residents are renters, rent control and rent stabilization have been two pillars of these affordable housing policies, done in tandem with developers, landlords and the real estate industry in general.

Rent control mainly applies to building erected before 1947. Tenants who live in these buildings cannot be charged market prices and can only be evicted on the basis of strict rules set by the City, namely the New York Rent Guidelines Board, which assigns to each building in the City, a Maximum Base Rent (MBR), which can be adjusted every two years within the magnitude of the building utility, maintenance and operating costs. This policy however gives landlords of lot of room to wiggle with their building operating costs and the amount of resources they devote to providing services to their tenants.

Rent Stabilization similarly limits the amount of money a landlord can charge a tenant for rent. Buildings are usually subject to rent stabilization when they become vacant after having been previously under rent control regime. To qualify, buildings should also have been built before 1947, and vacated after June 30, 1971 (Maurasse, p.101). These strict regulations, the limited amount of land available in the City, particularly in Manhattan, and the speculation exerted in the real estate market show well at what extend housing is a scarce commodity in Harlem, especially for immigrants, most of whom are illegal aliens in the U.S. They are thus not eligible to affordable housing, or lack the education and the leverage, or simply the minimum financial requirements to found decent housing in Harlem.

Ghan showed a deep interest in the subject of affordable housing, Now 47, he came to the US in the mid 1980s to carry on with his studies. Because he came with a tourist visa and decided to stay and carry on with school, he needed to change his B1/B2 visa into an F-student

visa, he told me that it took him almost one year to go to school, which he successfully did and eventually became a computer engineer.

He has been living in the same small two-bedroom apartment since the time he was a graduate student, and that despite his relative good earnings. He told me that “affordable housing should be banned from the social policy lexicon of New York City.”

He argue that affordable housing was an empty rhetoric that politicians and public officials had been using to lure and manipulate New Yorkers into the belief that we all one day will get to live in a nice and relatively cheap place, but in the meantime, we should all just shut up and pay our taxes, trust them on the issue and they will soon deliver.”

He laughingly swore that the long awaited “social revolt” in America will start in big American cities like New York where the increasingly poor, marginalized and frustrated segment of the population would rise up violently to demand equal treatment in access to housing and other vital social services. For him the status quo was no longer tenable and that if the City does not proactively address the issue “the patient will die in their hands.”

As Ghan remembered the Harlem of almost thirty years ago, he looked back in regrets and felt sorry for so many Africans “who invested so much of their existence in Harlem, but could not back then positively think about buying properties, when, in some instances, houses in Harlem were for up for grabs, sometimes for a symbolic dollar.”

He told me that he recalls his uncle’s wife trying to convince her husband to buy an apartment in East Harlem where they lived with their children, not without always getting strong negative answers from him.

Though he is aware that Africans did not have either the necessary political leverage or the financial resources to buy property in those days, there were certainly possibilities, especially for certain communities like Nigerian, Ghanaian or Senegalese, to buy some dilapidated and/or abandoned buildings and renovate them, which is now unthinkable when big banks and other financial institutions have been buying and renovated properties all over Harlem.

He also brought an interesting aspect about housing for immigrants in New York City. He said that there had never been specific housing policies targeting exclusively Africans in New York, who are practically an "invisible" minority that has no political representation—even though many of them are naturalized U.S. citizens and regularly pay taxes—, and thus cannot use any leverage whatsoever to advocate for easy access to housing or be given special treatment to benefit from new urban development schemes in Harlem.

According to Ghan, Africans have been confined in the social category of the poor and disenfranchised American minorities, even though their condition of immigrant is in many regards quite different from many people in that category. Either because they are relatively better off than the majority of black Americans who traditionally live in Harlem or because they are poorer. This situation has created several adequacies in how the "system" primarily deals with Africans in terms of access to housing, which remains their first concern, but also with regard to access to social services and jobs.

In Harlem, few Africans own properties or carry mortgages, whether it is housing or commercial mortgages. Some rare cases have been observed with certain religious organizations, namely churches or Muslim brotherhoods such as the Murid of Senegal who own several houses

that serve as Islamic schools or secondary residences for their leaders when they visit their disciples in New York City.

For Ghan this situation is quite unfortunate. He actually believes that immigrants can often raise considerable amounts of money through their networks of social solidarity and could have even been part, for example of the proposed solutions for the foreclosure crisis in New York.

Ghan's reflection touched on the same arguments that the ASA leaders are proposing to in part mitigate their growing fears with regard to housing for Senegalese immigrants in Harlem.

Sen2, one of the ASA leaders told me during the interview:

> We are so much concerned about the future of the Senegalese and African community in Harlem in general, including the possibility to keep our houses, businesses and our headquarters in the neighborhood, here where the majority of the community lives. We are so much concerned with that that we have recently developed a proposal to buy a multi-storied building that will host both the Association's headquarters and the Senegalese Consulate.

He added that they already argued the case before the Senegalese officials, namely the *Ministère des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur* (The Ministry in charge of the Senegalese Diaspora). They proposed that the Consulate redirect the funds they use as rent payment for their office on East 125th to the Association to use as down payment for the proposed building's mortgage.

According to him this initiative would bring a certain sense of security in the improbable future they currently face in Harlem, in terms of security of housing. And he hopes that all the other African Associations in the U.S. would replicate their plan and that African governments

would ultimately see the advantage of investing in the well-being of their citizens who lived abroad and who constitute one of the key actors in the development of the African continent.

j. Jobs and Economic Opportunities

Among many Harlemites who see gentrification as a positive step in the evolution of Harlem, the most optimistic view one can point to is the perception residents have on the economic revitalization of the neighborhood and the possibility of job creation that exists for thousand of longtime low-skilled, low-paid or simply unemployed residents.

That perception is also strongly shared by the representatives of the African community in Central Harlem that were interviewed. However, such a perception relatively varies, maybe because of the variety the sample offers in terms of professional activities.

In fact, most of the interviewees were professionals, business persons, or people engaged in some sort of trading activities, or simply out of the job market, either because they were full time or part time students, or housewives who deliberately chose, or were somehow forced to stay home to care for their families.

Among the study participants, only Burk and Tog were unemployed. Ken and the other three students all had part time jobs. Tog told me that she could not afford to work because she was taking care of her children, and because her overall health condition was relatively poor.

The other interviewees were all business people and professionals who hold full time jobs including Sen1 who is retired but dedicates most of his time to ASA and other community organizing activities.

From their views, the most recurrent preoccupation Africans in Harlem had, as far as jobs and economic opportunities were concerned, was access to financial capital and credit to develop their businesses—for business owners or traders—; for professionals to find better jobs in their respective professional fields; and for students to have enough financial resources to finish school and earn a degree that would allow them to find entry level or midcareer jobs.

To the question: “what do you except to get from the changes that are happening in Harlem”, the response led unanimously to “ a better and peaceful life.” And when I specified: “in terms of jobs and economic opportunities”, they mainly answered: “better jobs for all of us [the residents]” and “better schools and better infrastructure and social services for Harlem residents”

There was no real divergent view and/or extreme variance in terms of the interviewees’ economic expectations from the booming development of Harlem. However, one could feel some sort of an almost unspoken skepticism with regard to what a decade of gentrification has produced so far, and who the real benefactors were.

Take Ken for example. She was one of the youngest participants in the study. One can consider her as being totally American and well integrated into the American society, mostly because she came here when she was 8 years old, and did her entirely education here, and speak without any foreign accent. And despite her relatively young age she shows a great deal of maturity and a developed sense of responsibility. She is a junior student at City College and worked part time in a café. She explains to me how disappointed she had been in the so-called revitalization of Harlem. Not that she did not appreciate the safety of her neighborhood and the life in Harlem, which is “fun” as she puts it compared to what she heard it was decades ago. Her

disappointment actually resulted from her inability to find a better-paying job that could allow her to sustain herself and not having to rely heavily on her parents, especially her father whom she says has always "been there", but is often financially overwhelmed by his responsibilities here with his close family, as well as when dealing with his relatives in Africa, whom he helps by regularly sending money.

I then asked her how hard she actually tried to get a better-paying job, better than her current $8.0/per hour job. She told me that she has been trying for a year now without any success, and that despite the shops, restaurants and other businesses that are opening in her neighborhood—she lives off the 8th Avenue-116th Street corridor—she still could not even get an interview. As she realized that I might not be really convinced by her explanation, she added:

> I know, I know, it is not because I always write in the application that I can only work part time that I did not get anything. I am serious, most of my classmates who live in Harlem have been having trouble finding something good too. The economy might not be great, but I can see that young people are working in Harlem. I myself have a job now, but I did not know any of my coworkers before I start working there. Most of them are not from the neighborhood. Do you think all these new businesses employ people from the community? I doubt it. If Harlem should develop, it has to be with its residents. We pay taxes here and our families have lived here for a long time. Businesses should hire us first. We are not bad people. If you open a business somewhere and all your workers come from other places, I do not think that you could keep your customers, you will not be able to build trust between you and them. And I don't think that businesses want that for their image. Anyway, I don't know…

Ken's insight was actually very reminiscent of another view Burk had on job opportunities in Harlem. Though she did not study in the US, Burk has a high school diploma and speaks English fairly well. She said to me that she learned English in evening community classes that provide language training for immigrants when she first arrived in New York.

She also worked as an accounting clerk in Burkina before coming to New York. Now that her children are grown up, she has been looking to work full time to bring some money into the household and help her husband. But she could not get any, and is now very frustrated by the whole situation, especially because “businesses are opening everywhere in Harlem but still nothing was coming her way. It looked like Harlem residents were left out and were not really benefiting from that.”

When I asked the four business owners that I interviewed what they thought about doing business in Harlem these days, they showed mixed feelings, both about the actual state of their respective businesses, compared to a few years ago when they said they were making more money; and in their ability to expand their businesses.

Ivor who owns a fabric/textile business said that she had been lucky to still be able to keep her shop on 7th Avenue, because rent was getting “crazy” and her lease was set to last for a relatively short period of time. And whenever she had to renew it, she always had to fight hard to have her landlord not impose an increase.

She has been thinking about expanding her business using her own savings and money from her husband, but the latter found it risky for the moment, and would prefer that they get a loan from the bank. She herself is reluctant to add to her already “heavy” loan burden.

I asked her if she knew about UMEZ. She answered no, and after I explained what it was, she did not seem to be very attracted by the prospect of starting the application process and having to wait for a relatively long period of time. She then added that she did not “have any strong connections in Harlem’s politics to get a loan through such a big thing.”

When I asked Sen2, Sen3 and Guy1, who all owned businesses in the study area about UMEZ, they told me that they knew about it. But, they all added that—and these are the words of Guy1—, "it would be difficult to get funding from them. I am sure it is more for "big businesses." I replied that their mission was also geared towards helping small businesses in Upper Manhattan. Nonetheless, Sen3 who said she has already considered looking into UMEZ for financial assistance, and who knew where they were located on 125th Street, added that she had to drop the idea because, as a migrant, she might be too exposed if she had to provide certain details about her business or her personal life.

These latest insights definitely suggest that hopes for a mixed economy that could offer longtime Harlem low-income residents and low-skilled workers chances to have better jobs, including most African immigrants, seemed to be "a long shot."

Other participants—in particular, those among them who hold regular jobs, or are engaged in petty trading businesses—shared interesting insights with the researcher. These insights were a good example of the frustration many African immigrants experienced in their quest for better economic opportunities, especially when they see their neighborhood being revitalized, but still does not translate into jobs.

The stories mentioned above are good illustrations of the difficulty for gentrifying areas, such as Harlem, to provide, in a relatively short period, enough good jobs to build mixed economies, which many analysts have hailed as one of the most positive aspect of gentrification. They argue that it indeed brings about economic empowerment and financial stability for longtime low-income residents in gentrified areas. These residents then have the possibility to cope with the induced increase in housing prices, rent and costs of living in general.

k. The Future of Harlem (as seen by some African immigrants)

Throughout the interviews, African immigrants showed a strong *attachment*, a strong bond, almost an organic one, with Harlem. Most of them actually consider Harlem as their "home away from home." They particularly insisted on the unique cultural and symbolic character of Harlem, which despite its terrifying recent past, which most of them had the chance to witness, provides a sanctuary, a cultural and racial haven for Africans.

Furthermore, Africans raised some concerns about their future in Harlem, not in terms of the relationship they have with their "black cousins", or with Whites and Hispanics—relations which they deemed cordial, though minimal—, but with regard to their ability as a relatively low income and less educated group to stay in Harlem whose racial composition is shifting in favor of Hispanics and whites.

When I asked the study participants about their opinion on the future of Harlem, the responses were relatively varied. Some told me in a very pessimistic tone that Harlem was "on the go," that the neighborhood complete shift to a white and rich dominated area is just a matter of time.

Cong, whom I regard as the most pessimistic of my interviewees—my opinion is quite arbitrary in that I spent just about 50 minutes with him and my judgment is based primarily on his view on this particular subject—told me, when asked about the future of Harlem, that he knows that he will never end up his life in Harlem if he decided to stay in the US, because for him the "math" was simple. It was all about how much rent you can afford. He added:

> I will never be able to pay my rent here in let's say 10 years from now, 10 years at the most. I have a stable job, but I am not making much money, and there is no room for improvement for me. I have limited skills and education. You know, it is a reality, and the reality of rent is the same. It is cruel, but it is what it is. You pay or you leave. What would be my reality in 10 years will be also the reality of thousands of other poor people in Harlem, of thousands of families here. A time will come when we will have to go in silence and move somewhere else. That is how America works. Rich people always win because the system works the way they want it to work, in their favor. And those like me who are not rich think somewhere in their hearts that they will be rich one day and be happy about it. Harlem is a home for us, but it is a rented one. It will take time but rich people, not only whites, just rich people will own the place and we will have to leave.

As heartbroken as it might sound for people that insist that indigenous residents should be able to stay in Harlem, Cong's insight was similar to that of three or four other interviewees. Though this group strongly underlined the unique cultural and racial character of Harlem namely —its "undisputable black character", not just "American black" but "patchwork black," with pitches, tones of blackness from all over the African continent and the diaspora—, their views were very pessimistic, "market realistic" like Cong's.

They bluntly argued that Harlem was first of all a living place, and as all living places, it was subject to the forces of natural progress and evolution, not to say the forces of the market. The same way Harlem turned into a hospitable and decent place from the "madness" of the past, it could still evolve into a very rich place where only those who can afford it will live.

However, this relative pessimist or crude "market driven realism"—depending on the interpretation one gives these profound thoughts—contrasts with the more joyful and fully optimistic views shown by the larger number of African immigrants interviewed, regardless of age, income or geographic provenance. These eighteen or so interviewees basically argued that

the future of Harlem lay on diversity, a “multiple diversity” in which it was already embedded, thanks to the increasing number of races and cultures that were already mixing in Harlem. In diversity, they meant diversity in opportunities, diversity in resources, and diversity in the people that will live in the neighborhood in a few decades.

Nam for example, who throughout the interview raised strong concerns about the ability of longtime low-income residents to “sustain the pace of changes” in the neighborhood and retain their homes, told me that she was somehow optimistic about the future of Harlem and America in general. Her key argument resided in the current demographic shift that the country was experiencing.

She posited that though a sharp income redistribution to reduce poverty in America is not likely to happen any time soon, the tangible economic and social realities of life in big cities—shared by people of all races, social status, etc.—such as New York and Los Angeles, where people were mixing in great numbers, would eventually weigh positively against social and economic marginalization. Politicians and elected officials would have no choice than to deliver the demands of increasingly diverse constituents of Americans who will pressure cities to adopt inclusive and people-centered policies that favor mixing and protection of the most vulnerable populations.

Coming back to the issue of Harlem’s unique character, she argued that Harlem had reached such a high stage of “blackness,” an irreversible “black symbolism” that the City will have to enact, in a very near future, specific laws to protect the “traditional residents” who then will be forced to cohabit with more affluent whites and other middle class minorities.

For her, such a situation will mechanically lead to Harlem becoming a successful mixed community, which in turn will develop its unique culture so much so that it will become the epitome of a new world culture, and an example of tolerance and cordial race relations.

As much as Nam's prospective picture of Harlem is interested and attractive, both for Harlem and the future of racial urban integration in general, the scenario clearly necessitates good planning as well as a new urban orientation for Harlem.

VI. Conclusion and The Way Forward

Getting to agree on the causes, the essence of gentrification, how the process unfolds, who the gentrifiers are, and the impacts their presence has on the life of "traditional" residents, has always been a difficult and elusive endeavor. This is all the more true in the context of Harlem where the neighborhood is socially, ethnically and racially complex, and also because Harlem is perceived by many blacks, both indigenous and immigrants, as the world's "capital of black culture," whose "revival," they claim, they actively participated in, sometimes at the price of their lives.

The study took the daunting challenge of looking at gentrification in Central Harlem by giving longtime African residents the possibility to freely express their views on the gentrification of their neighborhood.

The study's sample rendered a good picture of African immigrants in Harlem in general. It also tried to give a large representation to the African Continent—participants came from all Africa's five main geographical subregions: West; East; Central; Southern, and Northern Africa. However, the sample's relative small size does not certainly allow a *perfect generalization* of

how gentrification is perceived in the entire Harlem neighborhood, nor is the study a perfect illustration of the very views African generally have on gentrification in Harlem. Nevertheless, the interviews the researcher conducted revealed very interested and diverse personal insights on gentrification in Harlem.

These insights suggest that, in the aggregate, Africans in Central Harlem positively regard gentrification in their neighborhood. Furthermore, they generally see the process as an inevitable step in what they prefer to call the "revitalization" of Harlem, which they believe should be credited to black people who initiated it some two decades ago as New York City's economy was recovering from the 1980s recession, to enjoy, by the end of the 1990s, a significant boom typical of the good performance of the broader U.S. economy.

However, despite the overall appreciation of gentrification, African immigrants who participated in the study raised great concerns about the negative effects it has on longtime Harlem residents.

These apprehensions revolved around the increasing price of rent, the relative higher prices of groceries and other key services in the neighborhood, especially while Harlem booming economy, namely its flourishing business and service industries, seemed incapable of delivering the promises of a mixed economy tantamount to better jobs and more economic opportunities for the residents.

The majority of Africans interviewed showed strong faith in the future of Harlem which they consider as their "home away from home," a quasi "sanctified" and sacred cultural place, in which they believe they deserved a special place where they can live peacefully, pursue their

dreams of prosperity in America, and where they can weave their cultural and ethnic specificities within the larger “sanctity of black culture.”

Harlem is also for these African immigrants a place where they can mitigate the uncertainties linked to their condition of migrant as well as the vicissitudes of life in the US.

Now, when one analyzes the multitude of personal views of gentrification that transpired from the study, the positives; the negatives; the ups and downs; and the complex dynamics gentrification operates in the lives of Harlem longtime residents, several questions come to mind, especially the following ones: why should one care about gentrification in Harlem? Is it not just natural that poor neighborhoods get better and that market forces do the rest by determining who lives there or not? And, if one deeply cares about the future of Harlem and about its longtime residents, for one reason or another, what ought to be done in a practical way to mitigate the possible negative aspects of gentrification?

Many analysts who ventured into the complex realm of gentrification posed similar tough questions, and the answers they brought were as much varied as their views on the subject, let alone the ideologies on which they rest.

The study argues that in order to help longtime residents in gentrifying areas cope with the negatives of gentrification and retain their homes, it is imperative for the City to adopt various planning and policy strategies that give the neighborhood a new spatial configuration and an economic orientation within the greater spatial and economic urban landscape of the city in which the neighborhoods are located.

In the specific case of Harlem, namely central Harlem, there is a great sense of urgency to act now, mainly because the gentrification of the neighborhood is a *fait accompli*, which begs for practical and context specific planning and policy interventions.

Furthermore, from the residents' perspective, the study believes that community participation, specifically "community bondage"—for example, between African Americans and Africans—within the framework of local community organizations is crucial for Harlem residents, African in particular, to mitigate the negative sides of gentrification.

1. *Planning and Policy Strategies for Central Harlem*

New York City's planning officials and urban policy makers should be at the forefront of any strategy designed to mitigate gentrification's negative impacts on the lives of longtime residents, including African immigrants. To that end, they should adapt some of the existing policies and planning tools that are already in use in Harlem to meet the needs and demands of African immigrants. As the study revealed, these demands are mainly centered on housing security—namely their ability to keep their houses or to be able to rent housing in the neighborhood—; and on economic opportunities—primarily jobs and access to business investment capital for local residents.

a. Revise New York City Rent Control and Rent stabilization Policies

Rent Control and Rent stabilization policies, as they currently stand are not conducive to benefitting a greater number of low-income residents in Harlem, including African immigrants in general. These two policies are based on a quasi fixed number of already existing buildings, which are susceptible to substantial decrease every year. This situation is due mainly to the "building age rule", which makes only buildings built before 1947 eligible to rent control, and to

rent stabilization once they are vacated; and also to the "continuous residency rule" that makes eligible to rent control only people who have been living in their apartments since 1971—one or two-family homes have different rules.

Amending both rules; "recruiting" new younger buildings in the programs; and at the same time setting up a new formula for Maximum Base Rent (MBR), which would strictly prevent landlords from wiggling at ease with building utilities, operating and maintenance fees, could help the City extend its bulk of affordable renting units in the neighborhood.

Such an approach evidently necessitates the collaboration of landlords and real estate companies through the allocation of financial or other incentives.

b. Inclusionary Zoning

Inclusionary zoning is a powerful tool to provide affordable housing to low-income households. With Inclusionary zoning, the City requires developers to set aside subsidized units for density bonuses or tax breaks or other financial incentives. As recommended by Freeman, it adapts well to gentrifying neighborhoods like Harlem where "there is substantial new development on vacant land or gutted buildings" (Freeman, 2006. pp. 172-173).

In the case of Central Harlem, especially in the designated study area—which incorporates the whole of *Little Senegal*—where is a sizeable number of immigrants, inclusionary zoning could be promoted for new developments to set aside a certain number of housing units for low-income households. Such a scheme could benefit African immigrants who mostly belong to a low-income economic category.

c. Economic Development Strategies

Economic development is at the beginning and the end of gentrification. When a neighborhood receives substantial investments and subsequently attracts more businesses and more affluent people, one talks of gentrification, which in this case is a function of economic development. When a gentrified neighborhood provides jobs and other economic opportunities to its indigenous residents and managed to lift them out of poverty, it is also a function of economic development. So, it is crucial that gentrifying neighborhoods such as Harlem benefit from well devised economic development schemes that will primarily benefit the traditional low-income residents.

In the context of Harlem, the key driving force behind such a scenario should be UMEZ. Over the past years, the platform provided funding for many businesses in Harlem, but critics argued that it still did not meet the residents' expectations, especially in terms of reaching out to small businesses, "pop and mom businesses," and to quasi-informal businesses run by immigrants or other minority groups.

UMEZ should help African immigrants businesses located on the 116th commercial corridor—between 8th Avenue and Lenox in a West-East direction, including the Harlem Market—establish a capital investment Business Improvement District (BID), with UMEZ matching a certain percentage of the yearly tax levied from the businesses through the BID.

Such an initiative would help African businesses, and other African Americans and minorities-held businesses in the area mitigate the uncertainties of tenure, and at the same time expand their businesses.

A solid implantation of African businesses and black businesses in general in Harlem can considerably help the neighborhood keep both its social fabric and make local businesses competitive vis a vis their newly arrived counterparts.

2. Community Participation

a. *Immigrant Participation in Harlem Community Boards*

All the planning and policy interventions that have been referred to above, and which are believed to mitigate the effects of gentrification on Harlem longtime residents, including African immigrants, are probably doomed to failure if there is no substantial and active participation by beneficiary residents in their elaboration and application.

Community participation first entails residents' active involvement in the Harlem Community Boards deliberative and decision-making processes. Harlem Community Boards (CB) should play an essential role in the implementation of the policies and tools the City deploys in gentrified neighborhoods. However, as some residents pointed out, CBs in Harlem are not very representative of their constituencies as they often ignore the presence of immigrants, and do not take into account their demands in their deliberations. They should reach out more to the vibrant social and civic organizations that represent the local immigrants and give them an "institutionalized space" where they could freely express their views and raise their concerns about both the current state and the future of their neighborhoods.

b. *"Community Bonding"*

Mobilization and community participation for a better Harlem also entails "community bonding" by the various Harlem local communities, viz., between the "traditional"—African American and

Latino communities—and the relatively recent but growing—both in numbers and in importance—African community.

In fact, Africans in Harlem have built over the past two decades strong networks of solidarity, mostly through their country of origin' or faith based/religious organizations.

In Central Harlem, the *Association des Senegalais d'Amerique* (ASA), founded in 1989 and the Murid Islamic Community of America (MICA), which is the main Murid brotherhood's religious associational platform in America, are the most important African immigrants' organizations. They provide their members and Senegalese in particular, with social services, family counseling, legal help, English and religious schooling, and at times help members in desperate need with temporary accommodation.

On the "indigenous side", community-based organizations (CBO)—with regard to the traditional African American and Latino communities—have played a very important role in the revitalization of Harlem. Non-profit organizations such as Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement (HCCI), Community Pride, 116th Street Block Association, Accion U.S.A.; community development corporations like the Harlem Community Development Corporation (Harlem CDC), local churches of various denominations, and a limited number of mosques—the Malcolm Shabazz Mosque in particular—have raised millions of dollars to revitalize Harlem, by building or renovating houses or street blocks, by setting up schools, health centers, food markets and other social amenities, or by attracting businesses or helping local entrepreneurs start businesses in the community etc.

The large experience these CBOs have gained over the years, the relatively important amount of resources they hold or are able to garner within a relatively short period of time, and

the networks and connections they built in New York City, in Albany and Washington D.C., could greatly benefit the African community.

Within Harlem and the United States in general, inter-community/race relations have become relatively more cordial between native born and their African counterparts on one hand; and between Africans and other immigrants groups, Latino in particular on the other hand.

Most Africans in Harlem, in particular, believe that their community has become more "visible," better "understood" by Harlem indigenous communities, thanks in part to the social and cultural imprint they managed to stamp in many parts of Harlem, especially in Little Senegal.

Still, there is not really any formal collaboration between the communities, especially in terms of a shared vision of a Harlem where they could remain in the face of the increasing presence of a more affluent middle class, mostly white and better educated.

A *Community Forum*, featuring all local communities, including religious, cultural, non-profits, for-profits, grassroots, economic development corporations as well as representatives of Harlem respective CBs could be a wonderful tool whereby African immigrants could build stronger ties with their "indigenous" counterparts and ground their more personal strategies in a more favorable socio-political environment where they will probably gain more recognition and visibility, to live their "American dream" to the fullest.

VII. Appendixes

1. Interview Questionnaire

a. Demographic/Socioeconomic questions

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you lived in the U.S.A?
3. How long have you lived in Harlem?
4. How long have you lived in your current house?
5. What is your country of origin?
6. What is your matrimonial status?
7. How many children do you have?
8. What is your native language?
9. Do you speak English or any other foreign language?
10. What is your level of formal education?
11. What is your job?
12. What is your legal status in the U.S.A.?
13. How long have you been working at your present job?
14. What is the job that you held the longest in the U.S.A.?

b. Gentrification-related Questions[6]

1. How much do you think your neighborhood has changed over the course of your residence?
2. What do you think about the changes that are happening in your neighborhood?
3. Have these changes affected your life and that of your family?
4. What do you think about the increasing diversity happening in your neighborhood?
5. What is your relationship with other communities and social groups in your neighborhood?

2. Participant Recruitment Script

Greetings…, my name is Alioune Badara Dia.

I got your name from [**give reference name**] (if relevant).

I am a Senegalese student at the Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) at Columbia University. I am currently conducted a research on gentrification [**explained succinctly what it means**] in West Harlem.

The study mostly consists of interviews with some residents in this part of Harlem to ask them about their views of gentrification. Participation in an interview is voluntary and non-remunerative. The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and will include a set of questions about your demographic characteristics [**explained succinctly**] and other questions on what you think about gentrification in your neighborhood. You are free not to answer any question without giving me any explanation.

[6] After the more specific questions pertaining to the interviewee's socio-economic background, I asked the following questions in an open-ended way to allow the interviewee to talk more broadly about gentrification, viz., how they view the process, and how it might or might not have changed their lives (in terms of access to services and infrastructure, namely health facilities, transportation, school for their children, grocery shopping, restaurants etc.; new jobs opportunities; and their willingness or reluctance to stay in the neighborhood etc.).

Your participation will be strictly confidential; no information leading to your identification will be shared with the public. I will make sure that your identity is strictly protected. The information I will gather in the interviews will be solely kept and used by me for the final analysis of my research.

I would appreciate if you accept to join the study. If you accept to do so, we will meet at a time and at a place of your choosing, ideally your house or any private place where you will feel comfortable to freely discuss the issue.

If you have any question or concern, you may contact my supervisor at Columbia; his name is Professor Lance Freeman. I can give you his email or another way to contact him upon your request.

Thank you in advance.

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